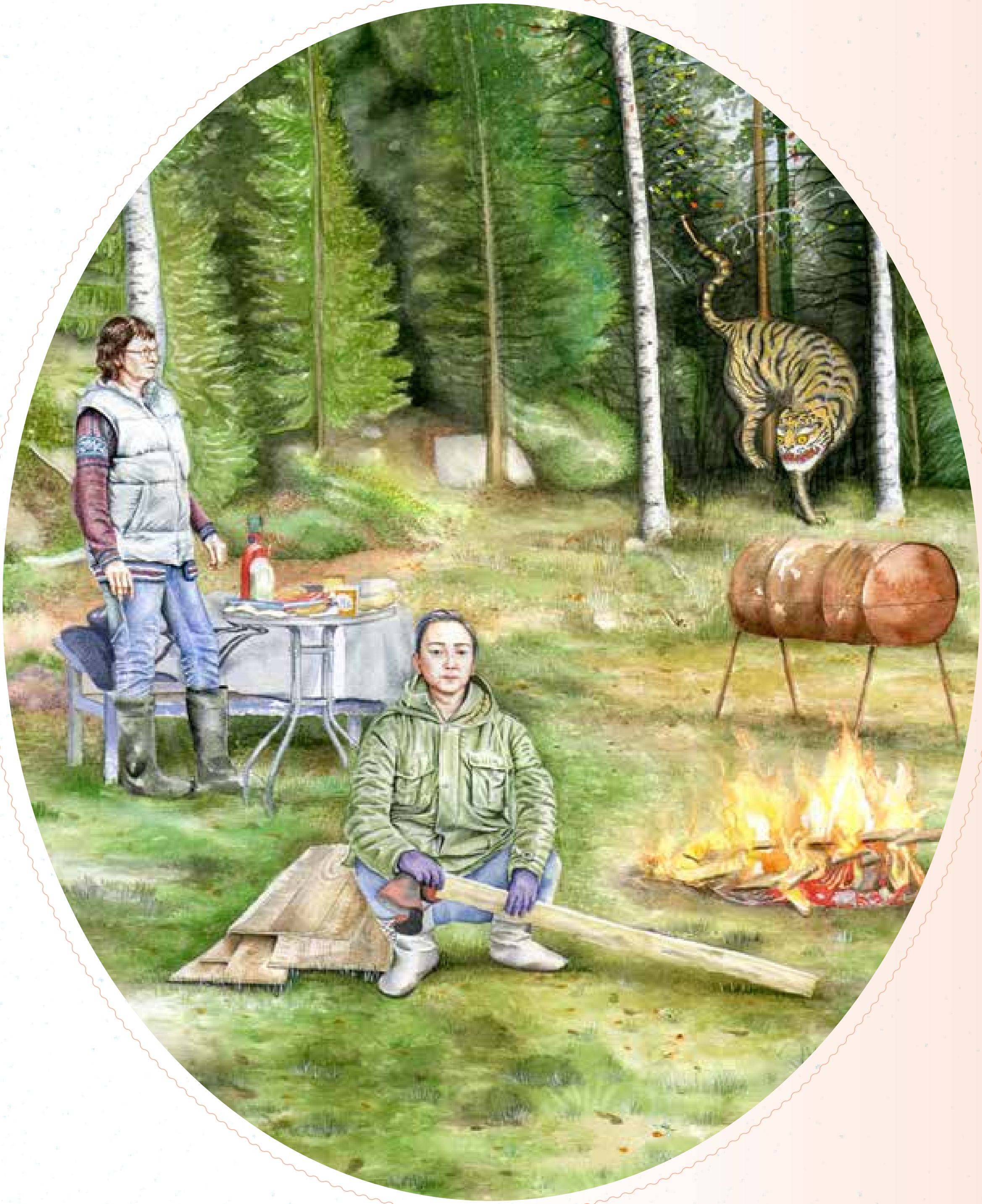
There Is No Place Like Home



Cecilia Hei Mee Flumé

There Is No Place Like Home

Cecilia Hei Mee Flumé

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Artistic Practice in Visual, Applied and Spatial Arts
Konstfack

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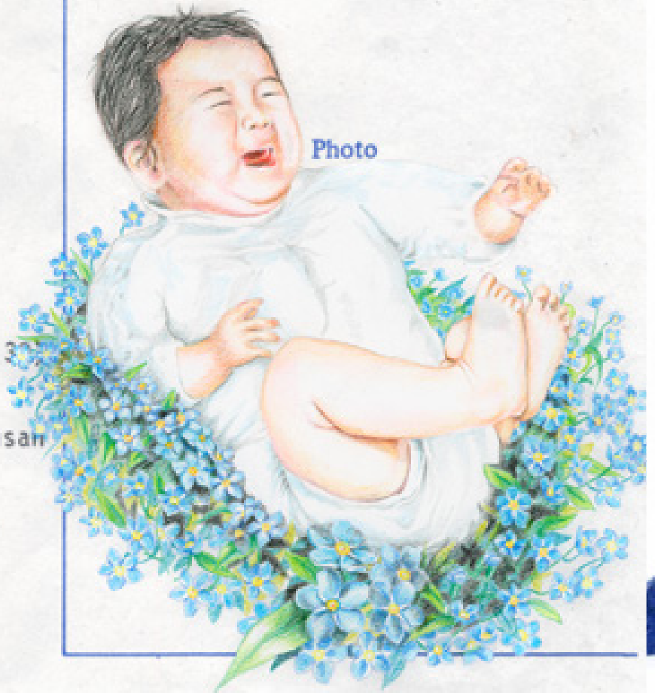
Chapter 1

Social Welfare Society
CENTRAL P.O. BOX 24
Seoul, Korea
TEL: 567-8891-3, 552-1015-8

CHILD STUDY



I. IDENTIFICATION

Child's Name	: Hei Mee KIM
Case Number	: 87-1555/CSY
Sex	: Female
Date of Birth	: September 7, 1987 (20:3
Racial Background	: Korean
Place of Birth	: A maternity home in Pusan
Present Location	: Foster Home in Sseoul
Meaning of Name	: Hei-blessed, Mee-jade, KIM-surname
Name given by	: SWS intake worker

II. HISTORY OF ADMISSION

Dates	:	Details
9/08/87	:	SWS Pusan Branch made a child intake after the interview with the birthparents.
9/18	:	SWS transferred this child to Seoul and placed her in a foster home.
10/20	:	SWS caseworker interviewed this child and took her photos.

III. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Biological Parents

	Father	Mother
Names of Parents :		
Age :		
Education :		
Occupation :		
Siblings :		
Marital Status :		

I was born out of paper.
Where others would look to
their mothers eyes and have
their origin mirrored I would
look at the thin sheets of rice-
paper. There the summary of me
was a case number.

– 1 –

입 양 동 의 서

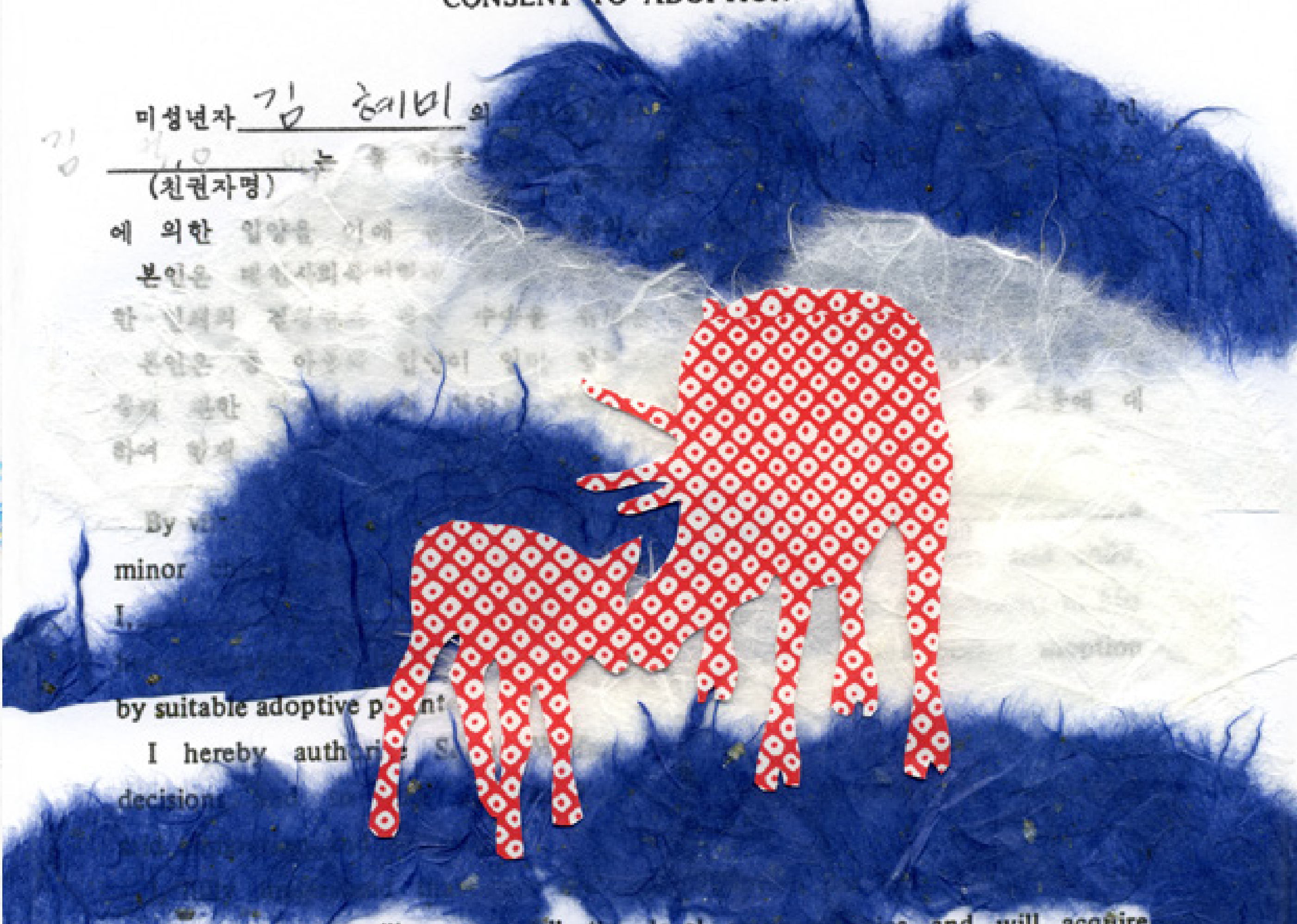
CONSENT TO ADOPTION

미성년자 김 혜미 의

(친권자명)

에 의한

본인은



By

minor

I

by suitable adoptive p

I hereby auth

decision

adoptive parents will assume all the legal responsibilities and will acquire all of the legal rights for the child, and I hereby waive any right which now I have over this child.

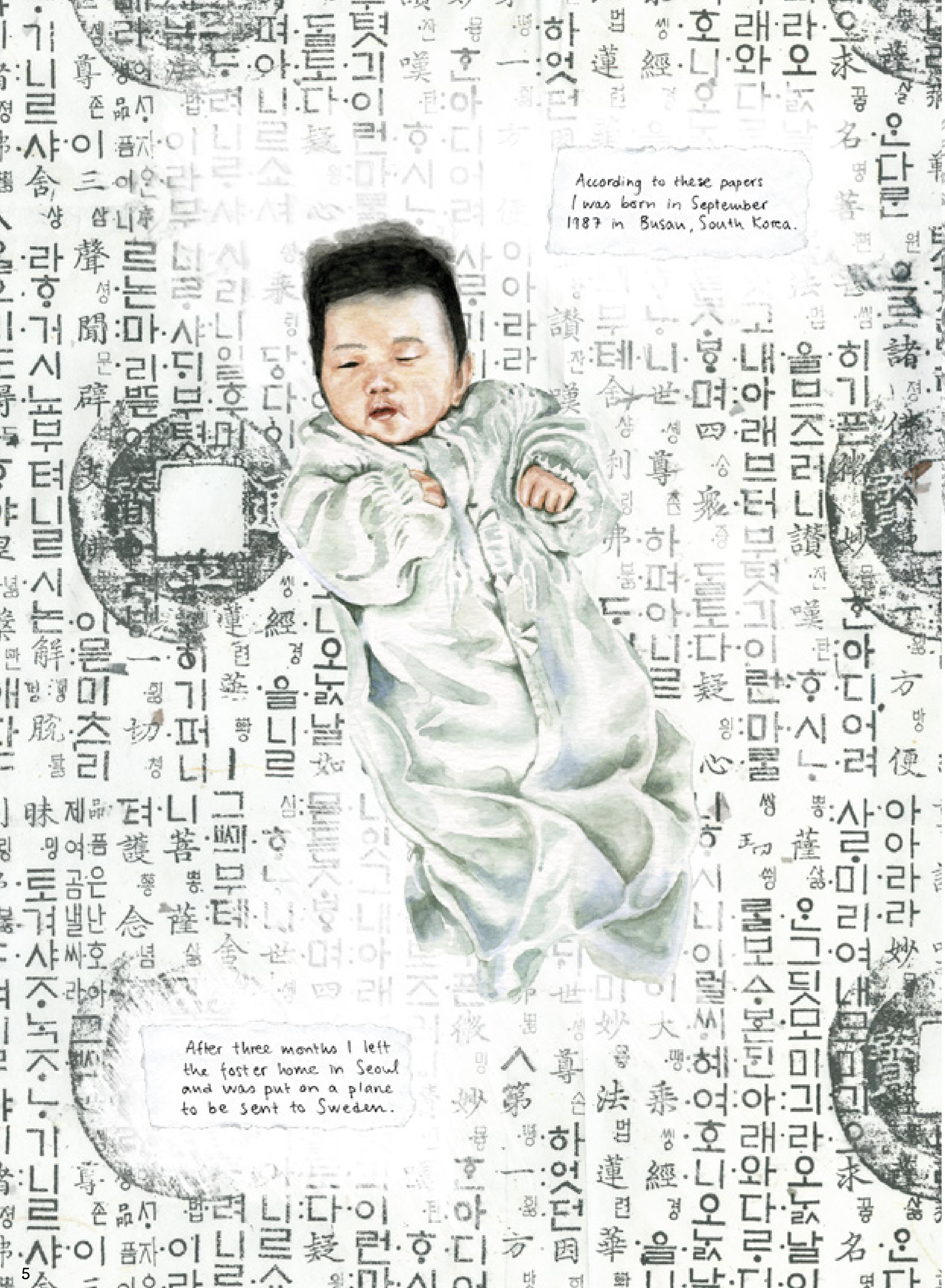
서기 198 7 년 9 월 8 일
Date

성 명 (부) Name of father 김 주민등록번호 Identification No.

성 명 (모) Name of mother 이 주민등록번호 Identification No.

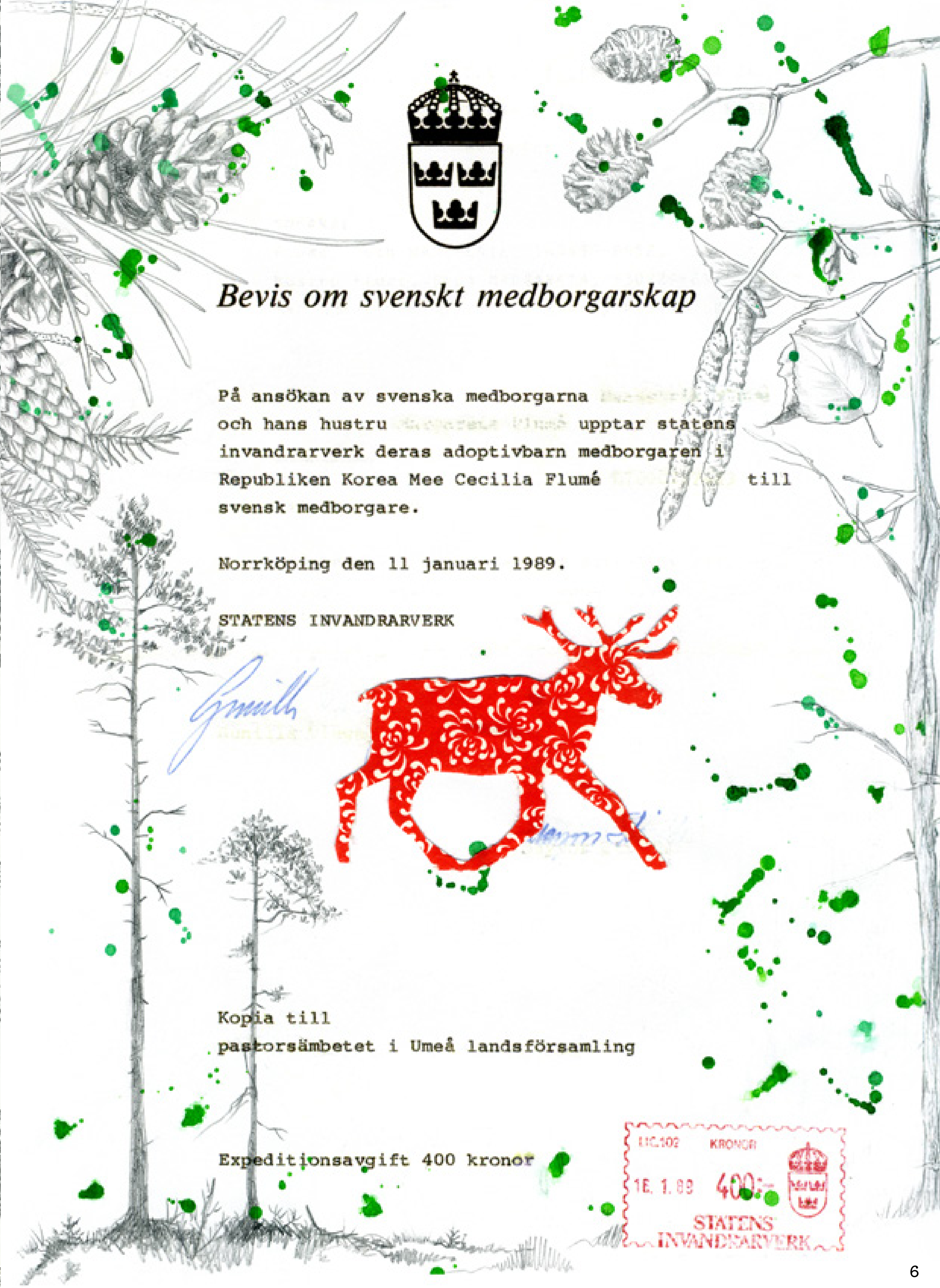
증 인 Name of witness 이 주민등록번호 Identification No.

관 계 Relation with child 조산원



According to these papers I was born in September 1987 in Busan, South Korea.

After three months I left the foster home in Seoul and was put on a plane to be sent to Sweden.



Bevis om svenskt medborgarskap

På ansökan av svenska medborgarna [redacted] och hans hustru [redacted] upptar statens invandrarverk deras adoptivbarn medborgaren i Republiken Korea Mee Cecilia Flumé [redacted] till svensk medborgare.

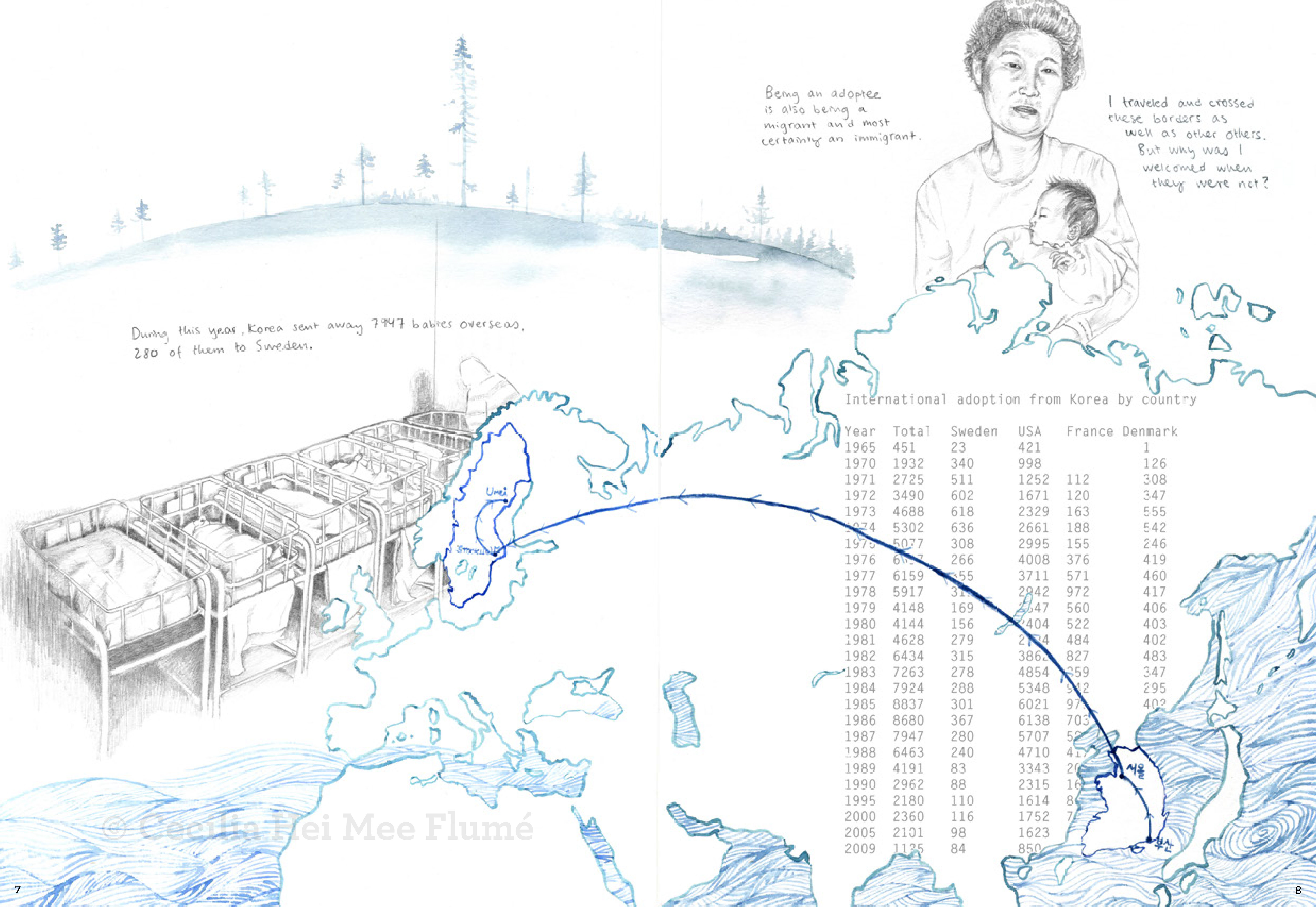
Norrköping den 11 januari 1989.

STATENS INVANDRARVERK

Kopia till
pastorsämbetet i Umeå landsförsamling

Expeditionsavgift 400 kronor

KRONOR
16. 1. 89 400:-
STATENS INVANDRARVERK



During this year, Korea sent away 7947 babies overseas, 280 of them to Sweden.

Being an adoptee is also being a migrant and most certainly an immigrant.

I traveled and crossed these borders as well as other others. But why was I welcomed when they were not?

International adoption from Korea by country

Year	Total	Sweden	USA	France	Denmark
1965	451	23	421		1
1970	1932	340	998		126
1971	2725	511	1252	112	308
1972	3490	602	1671	120	347
1973	4688	618	2329	163	555
1974	5302	636	2661	188	542
1975	5077	308	2995	155	246
1976	[illegible]	266	4008	376	419
1977	6159	[illegible]	3711	571	460
1978	5917	[illegible]	2942	972	417
1979	4148	169	[illegible]	560	406
1980	4144	156	[illegible]	522	403
1981	4628	279	[illegible]	484	402
1982	6434	315	[illegible]	827	483
1983	7263	278	4854	[illegible]	347
1984	7924	288	5348	[illegible]	295
1985	8837	301	6021	[illegible]	402
1986	8680	367	6138	703	[illegible]
1987	7947	280	5707	[illegible]	[illegible]
1988	6463	240	4710	[illegible]	[illegible]
1989	4191	83	3343	[illegible]	[illegible]
1990	2962	88	2315	[illegible]	[illegible]
1995	2180	110	1614	[illegible]	[illegible]
2000	2360	116	1752	[illegible]	[illegible]
2005	2101	98	1623	[illegible]	[illegible]
2009	1125	84	850	[illegible]	[illegible]

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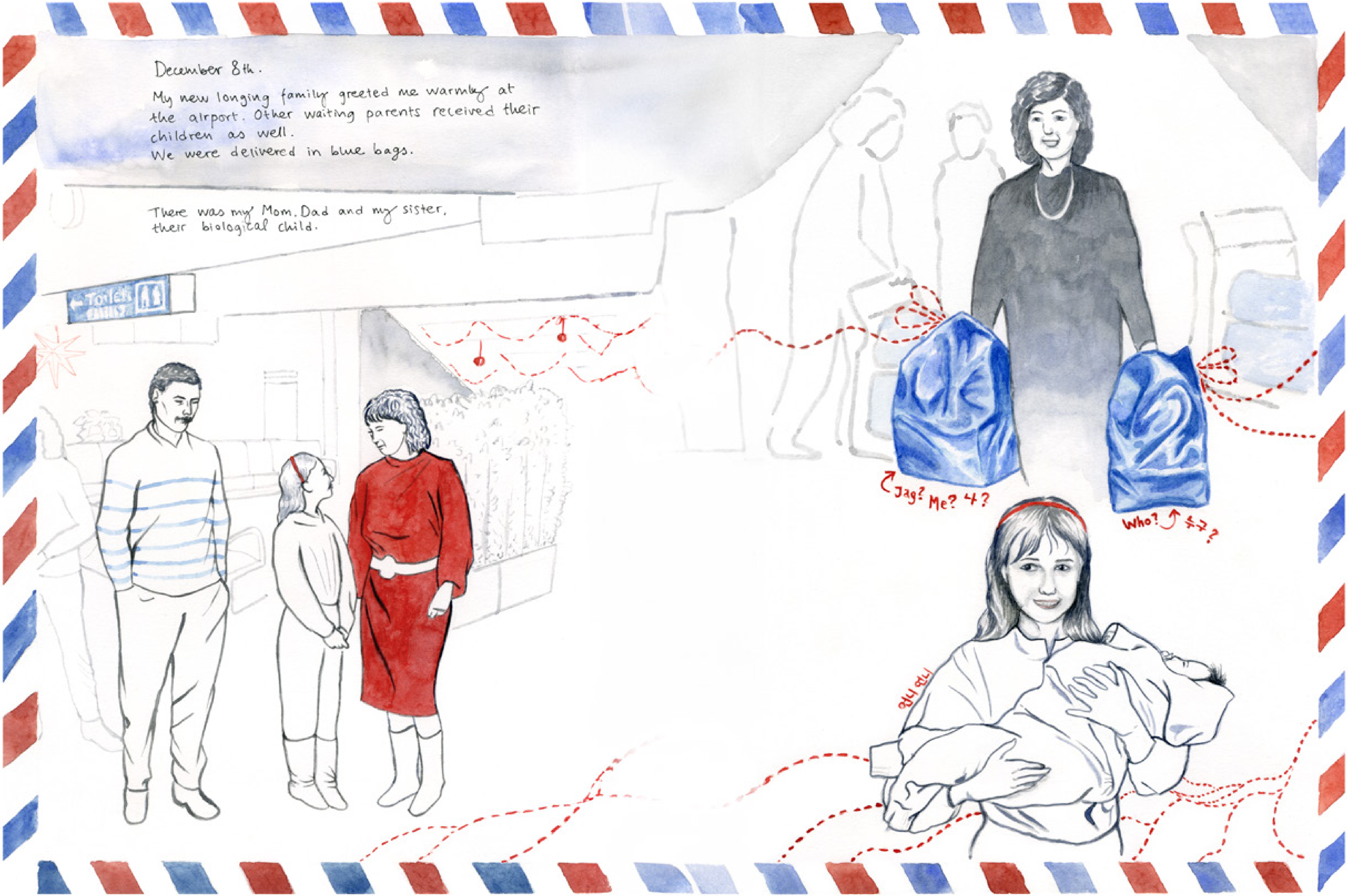
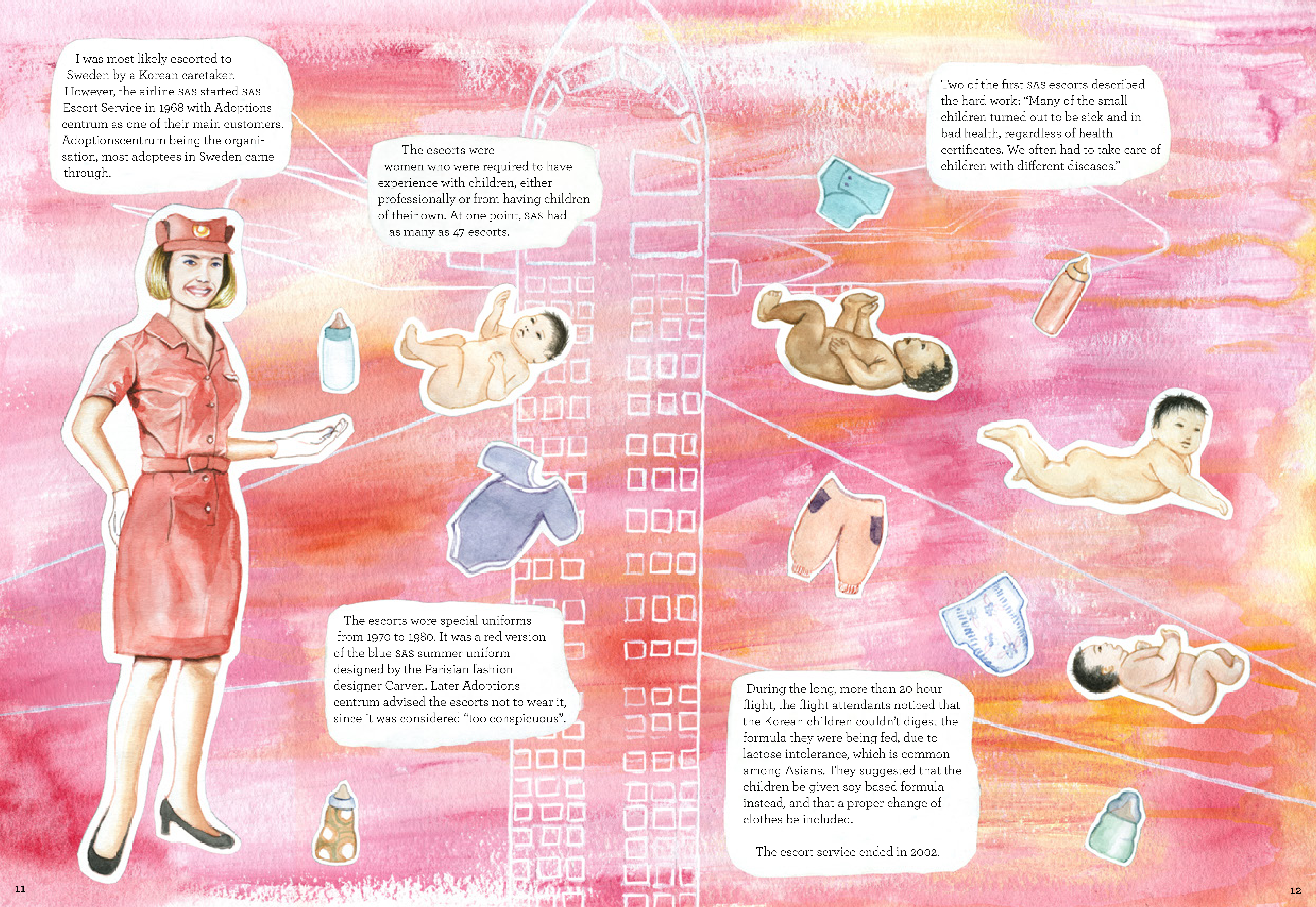
December 8th.

My new longing family greeted me warmly at the airport. Other waiting parents received their children as well.
We were delivered in blue bags.

There was my Mom, Dad and my sister, their biological child.


← Toilets
Jag? Me? 나?
Who? 누구?
언니 언니



I was most likely escorted to Sweden by a Korean caretaker. However, the airline SAS started SAS Escort Service in 1968 with Adoptionscentrum as one of their main customers. Adoptionscentrum being the organisation, most adoptees in Sweden came through.

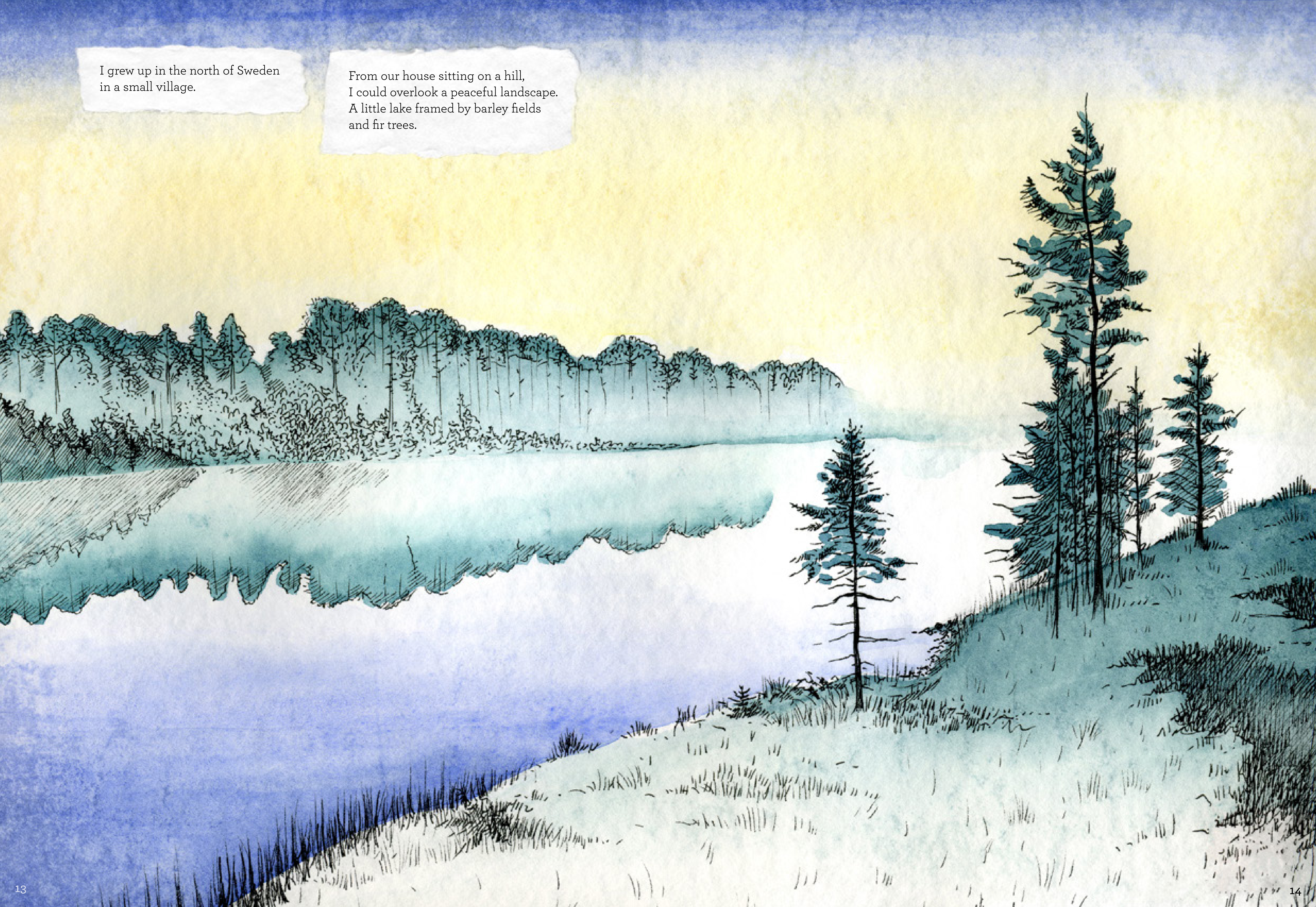
The escorts were women who were required to have experience with children, either professionally or from having children of their own. At one point, SAS had as many as 47 escorts.

The escorts wore special uniforms from 1970 to 1980. It was a red version of the blue SAS summer uniform designed by the Parisian fashion designer Carven. Later Adoptionscentrum advised the escorts not to wear it, since it was considered "too conspicuous".

Two of the first SAS escorts described the hard work: "Many of the small children turned out to be sick and in bad health, regardless of health certificates. We often had to take care of children with different diseases."

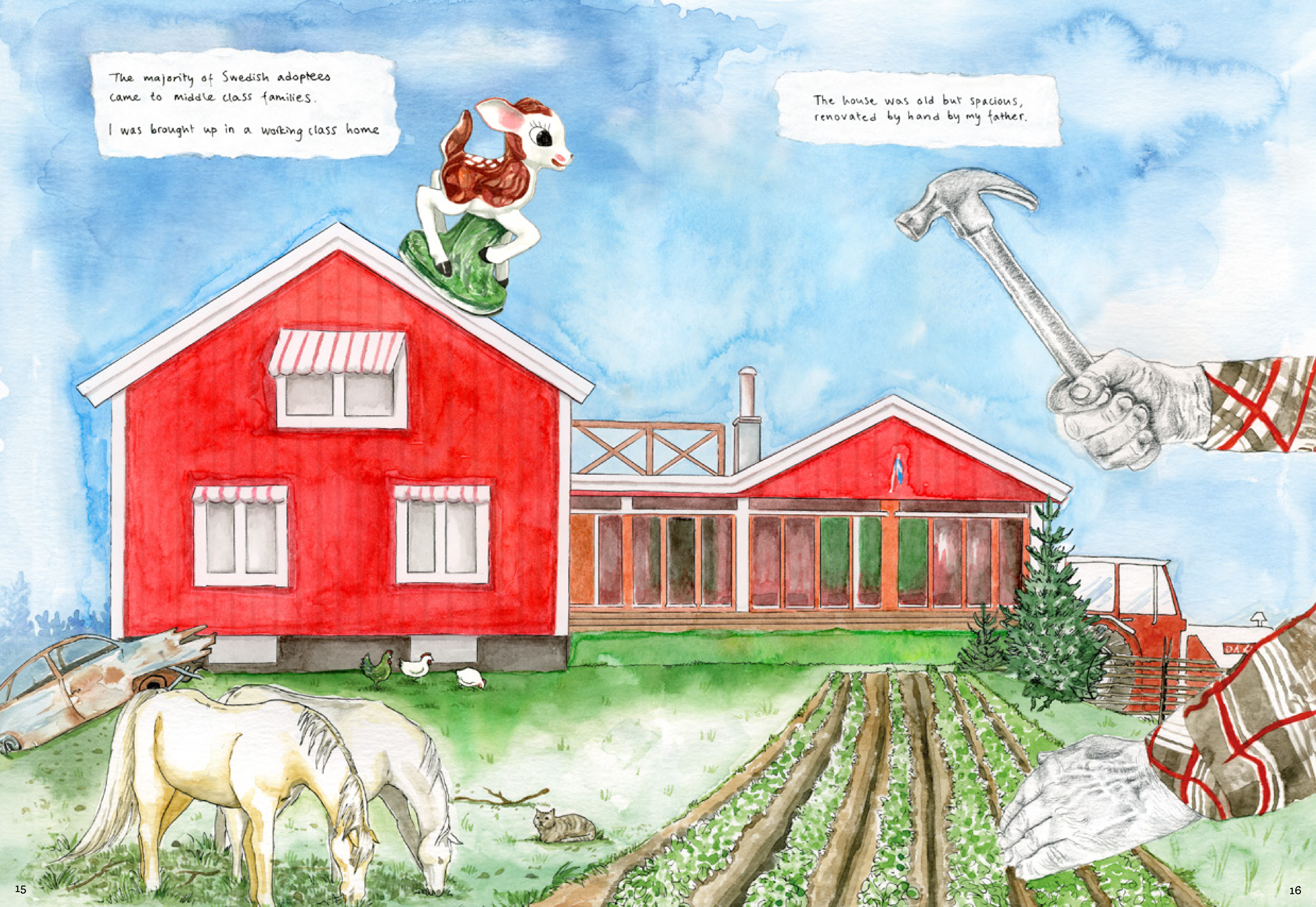
During the long, more than 20-hour flight, the flight attendants noticed that the Korean children couldn't digest the formula they were being fed, due to lactose intolerance, which is common among Asians. They suggested that the children be given soy-based formula instead, and that a proper change of clothes be included.

The escort service ended in 2002.



I grew up in the north of Sweden
in a small village.

From our house sitting on a hill,
I could overlook a peaceful landscape.
A little lake framed by barley fields
and fir trees.



The majority of Swedish adoptees came to middle class families.

I was brought up in a working class home

The house was old but spacious, renovated by hand by my father.

Dear mother,
grandmother,
mother's grandmother,

Did you worry about
keeping a home
paying the bills
Staying healthy

NY DAG
NYTT HOPP
NY GLÄDJE

When you
made these
images

To decorate
our home ?

You kept
the house
beautiful

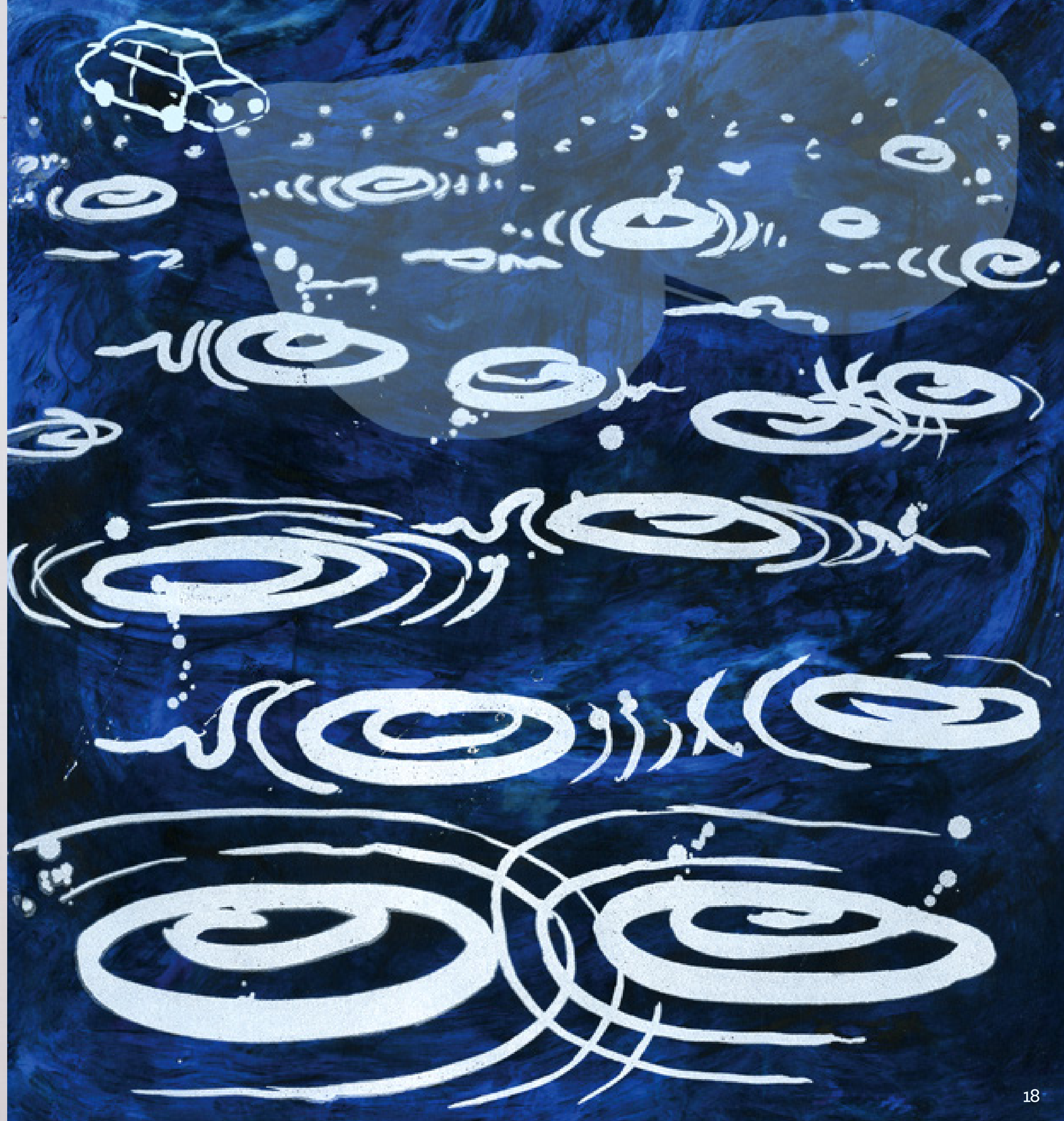
You picked
ornaments
you liked

ALL YOUR IMAGES
THEY ENTERED ME...

As a small baby, I would cry and
refuse to sleep. After hours of trying,
my parents would need to take me for
drives to lure me to sleep.

The doctor confirmed there was
nothing wrong with my stomach.
I was perfectly healthy.

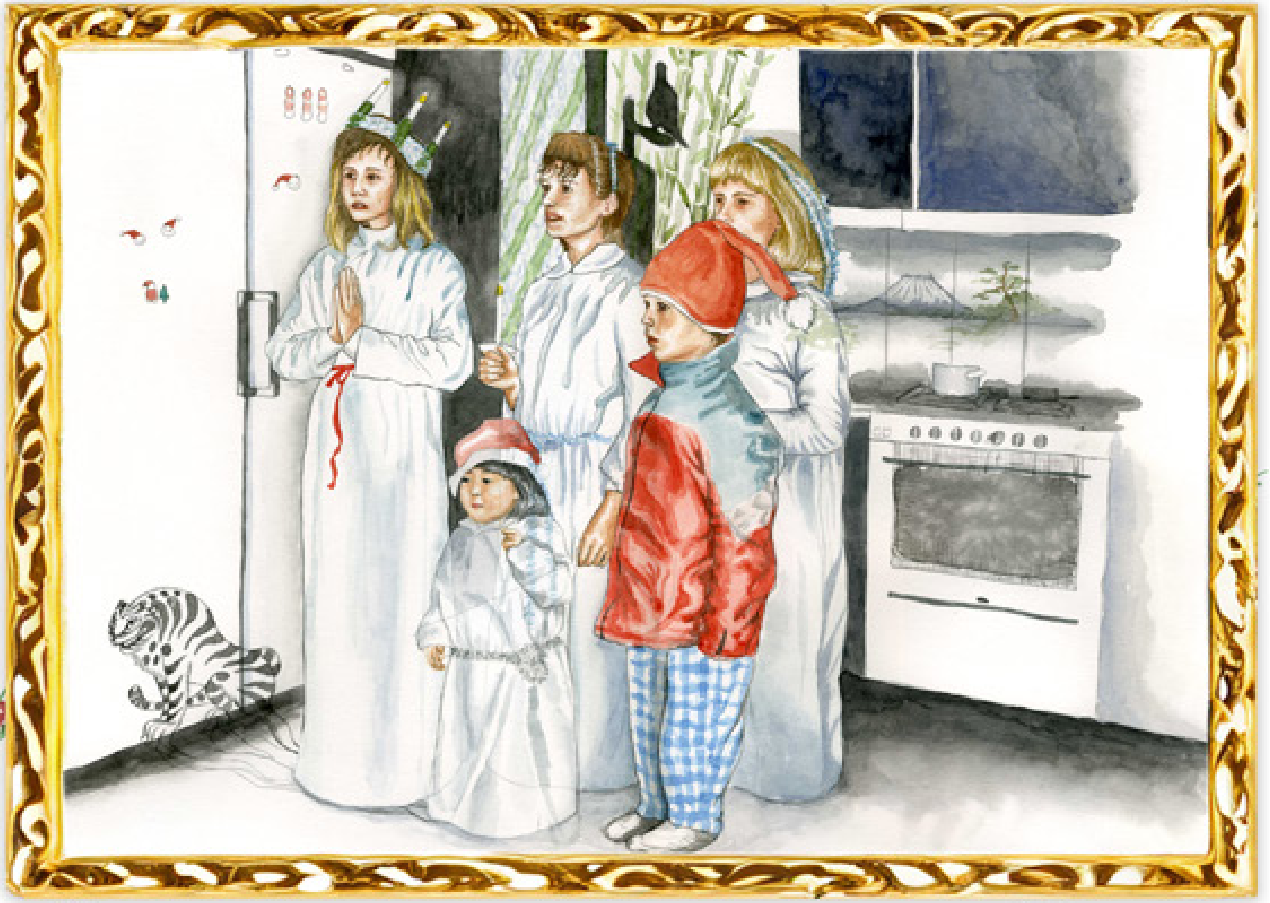
All babies cry.
But how can you tell
if a baby is heartbroken?



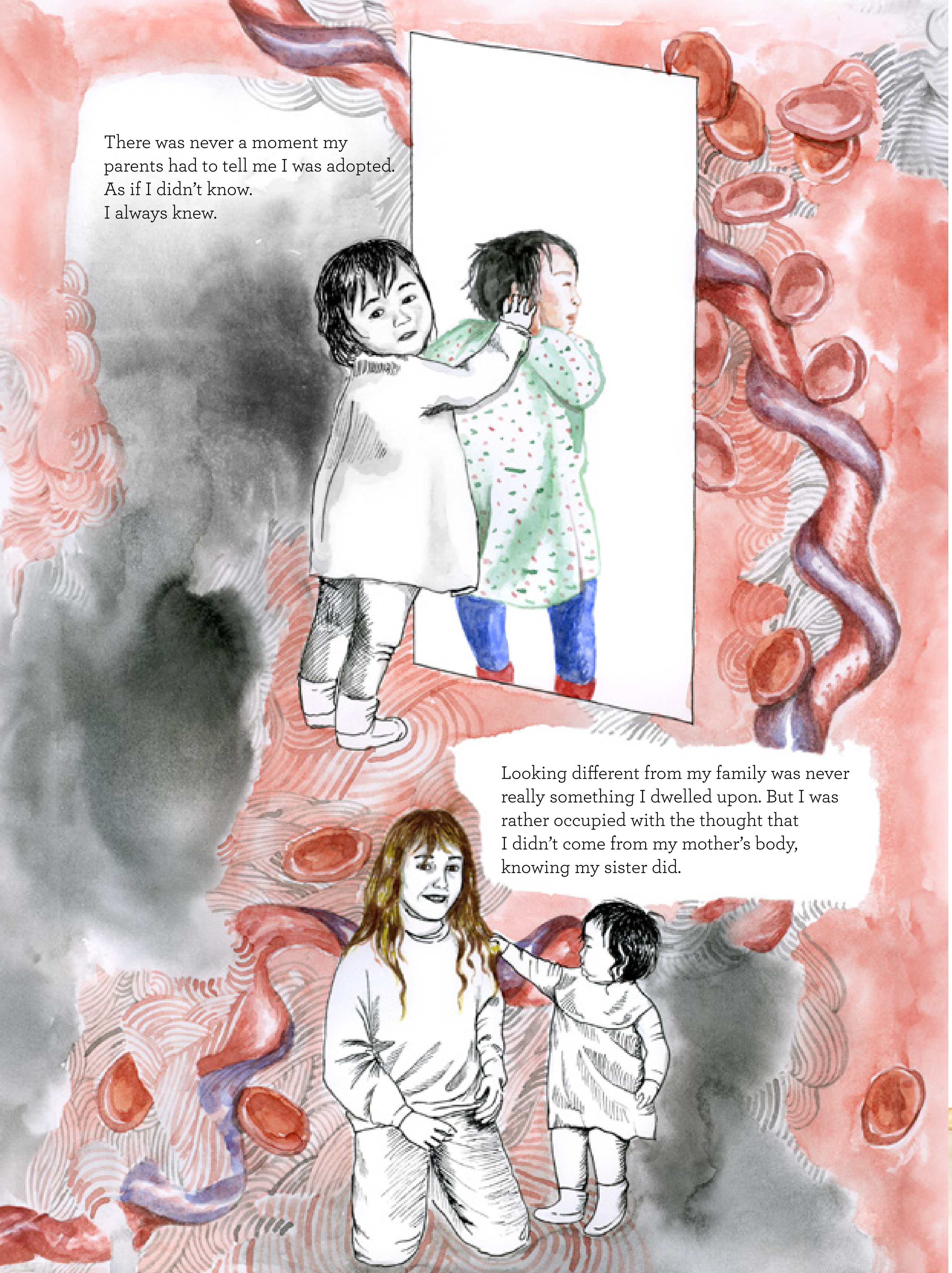
Eventually the crying stopped.
I grew older like any other child.

painted in to

the picturesque

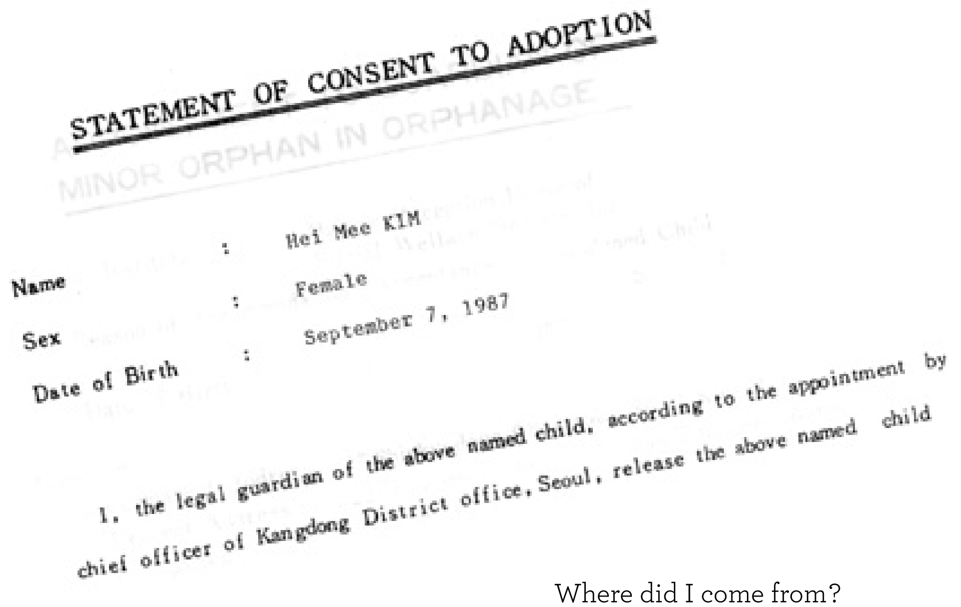


Swedishness



There was never a moment my
parents had to tell me I was adopted.
As if I didn't know.
I always knew.

Looking different from my family was never really something I dwelled upon. But I was rather occupied with the thought that I didn't come from my mother's body, knowing my sister did.



STATEMENT OF CONSENT TO ADOPTION

Name : Hei Mee KIM

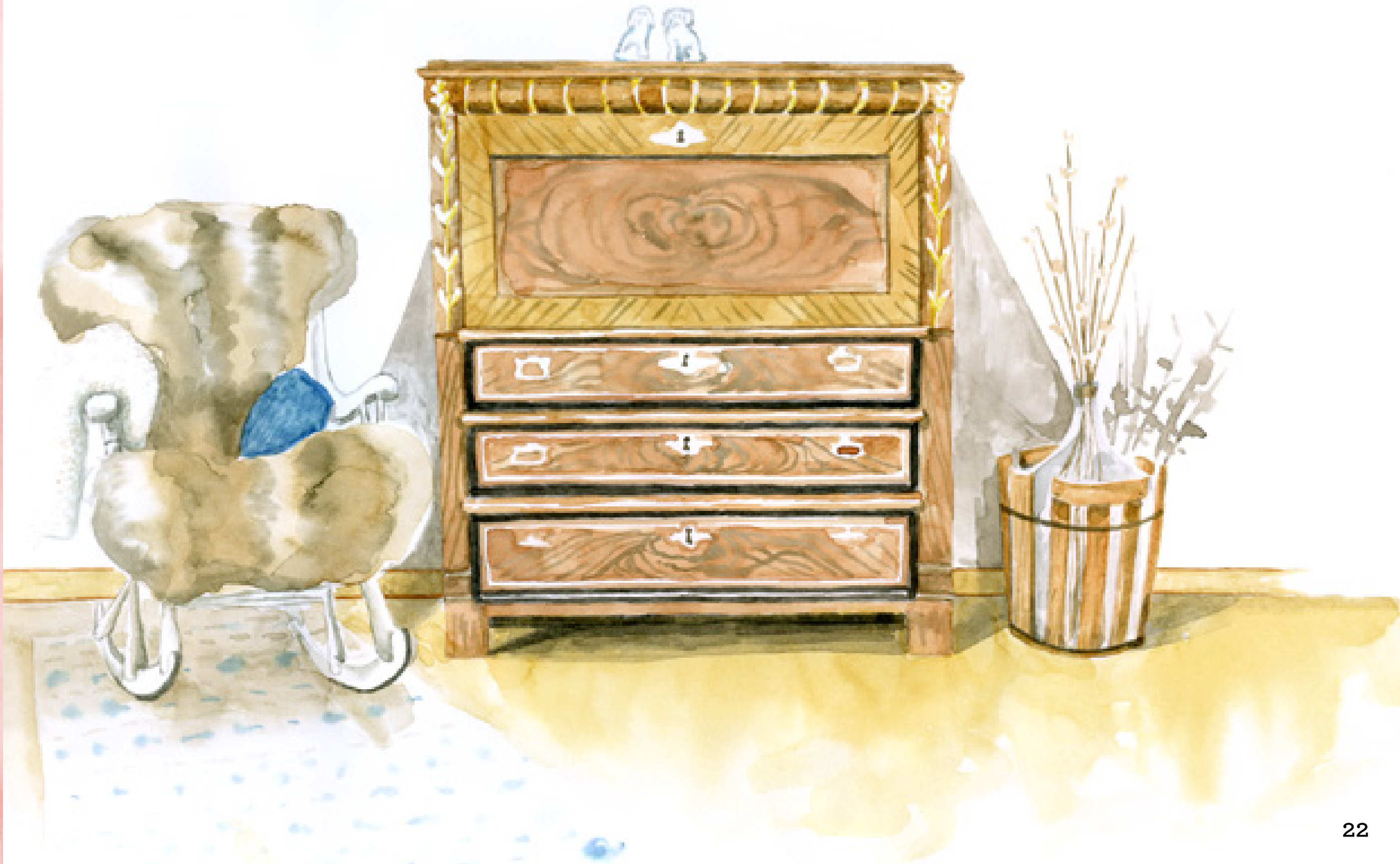
Sex : Female

Date of Birth : September 7, 1987

I, the legal guardian of the above named child, according to the appointment by chief officer of Kangdong District office, Seoul, release the above named child

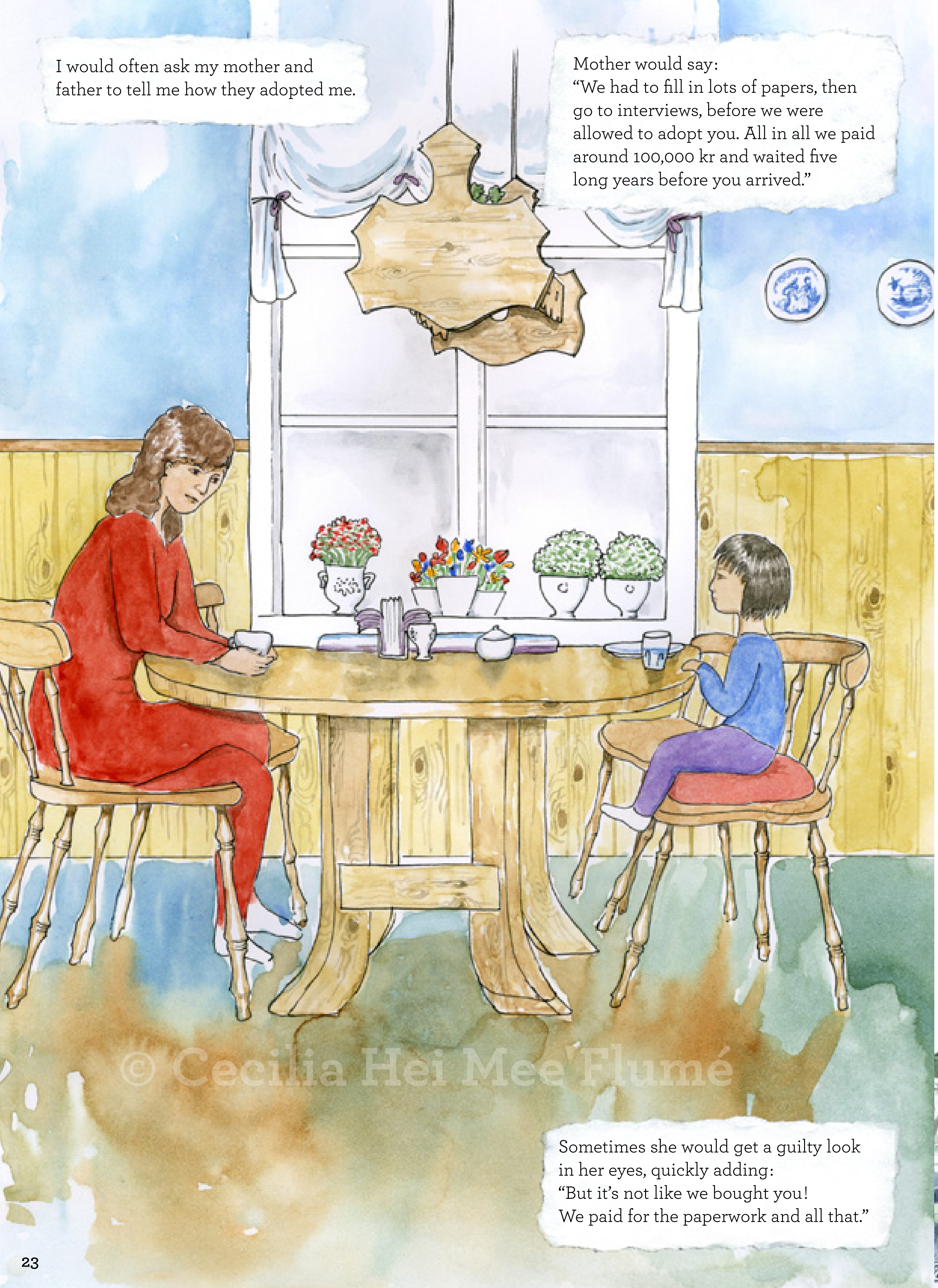
Where did I come from?

I turned to the chest of drawers where the adoption papers were resting.



I would often ask my mother and father to tell me how they adopted me.

Mother would say:
"We had to fill in lots of papers, then go to interviews, before we were allowed to adopt you. All in all we paid around 100,000 kr and waited five long years before you arrived."



Sometimes she would get a guilty look in her eyes, quickly adding:
"But it's not like we bought you!
We paid for the paperwork and all that."

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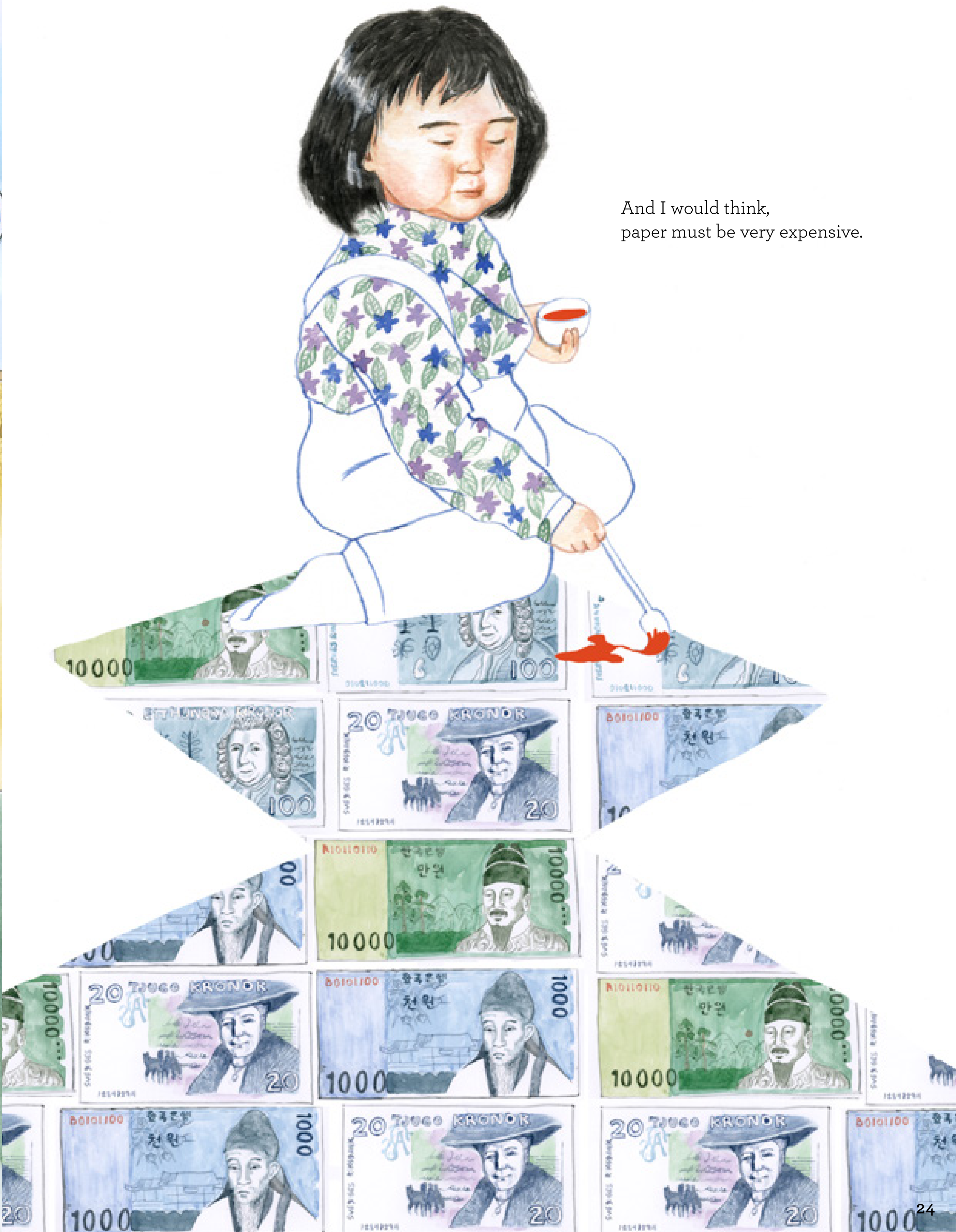
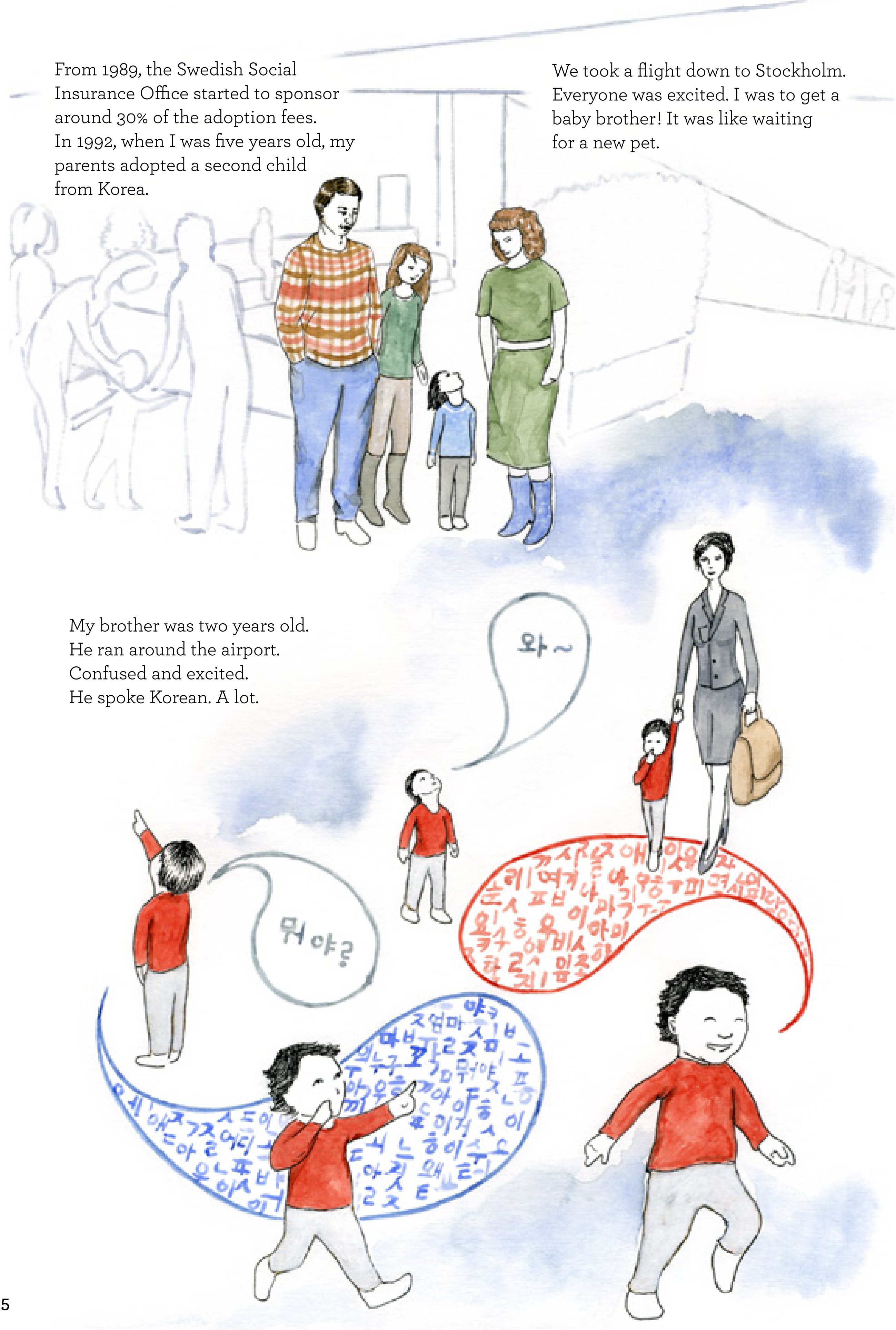
And I would think,
paper must be very expensive.

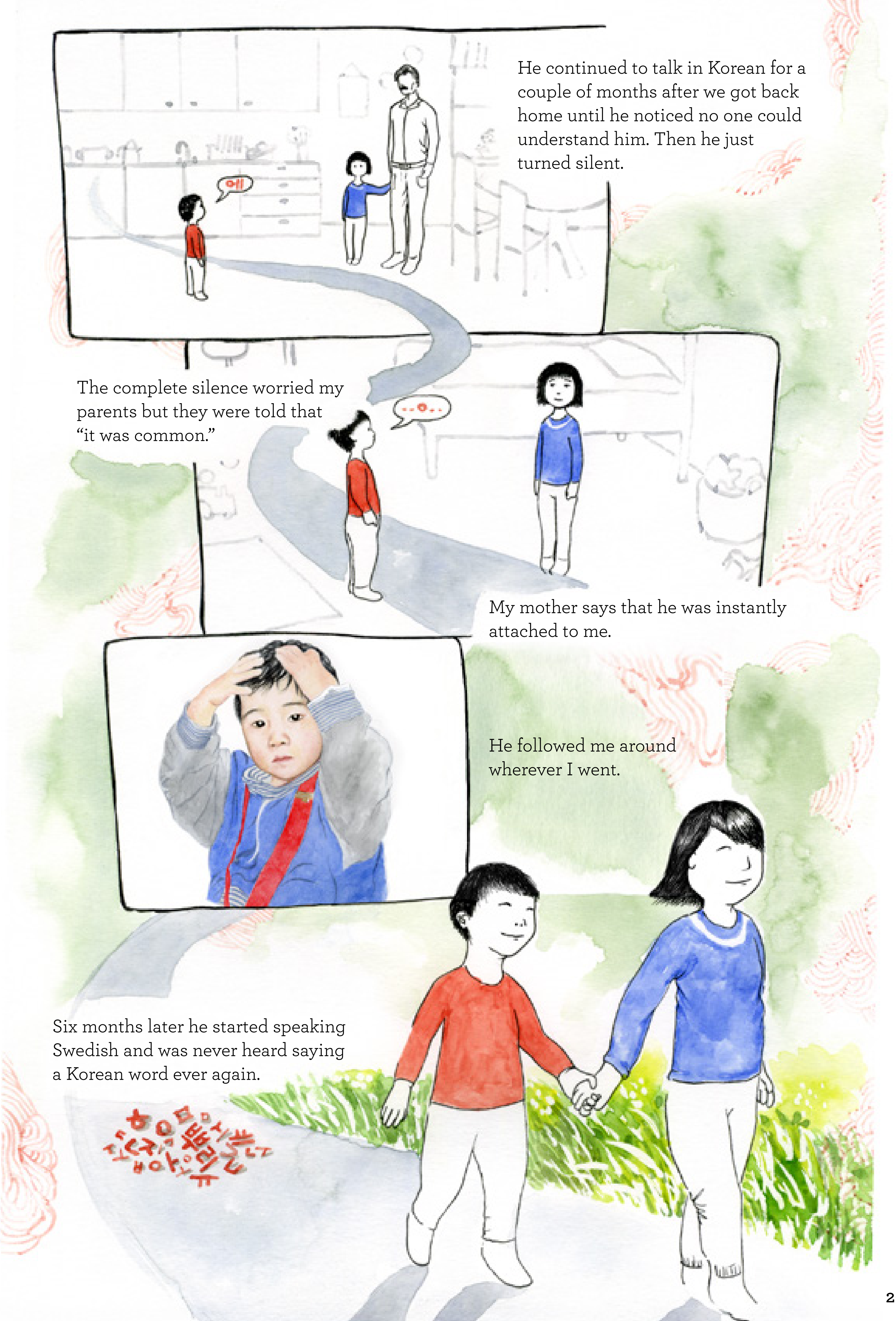




From 1989, the Swedish Social Insurance Office started to sponsor around 30% of the adoption fees.
In 1992, when I was five years old, my parents adopted a second child from Korea.

We took a flight down to Stockholm. Everyone was excited. I was to get a baby brother! It was like waiting for a new pet.

My brother was two years old.
He ran around the airport.
Confused and excited.
He spoke Korean. A lot.



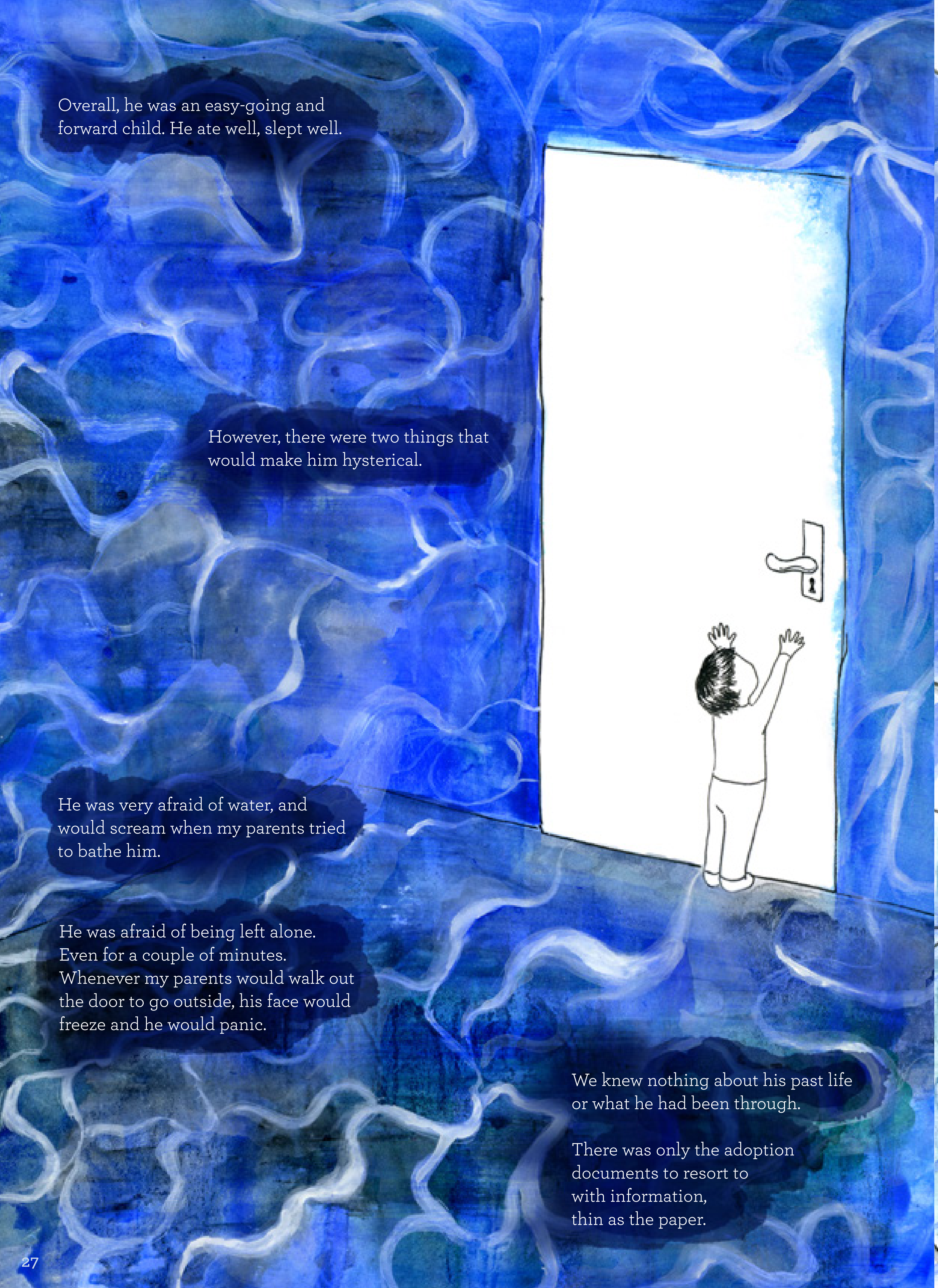
He continued to talk in Korean for a couple of months after we got back home until he noticed no one could understand him. Then he just turned silent.

The complete silence worried my parents but they were told that "it was common."

My mother says that he was instantly attached to me.

He followed me around wherever I went.

Six months later he started speaking Swedish and was never heard saying a Korean word ever again.



Overall, he was an easy-going and forward child. He ate well, slept well.

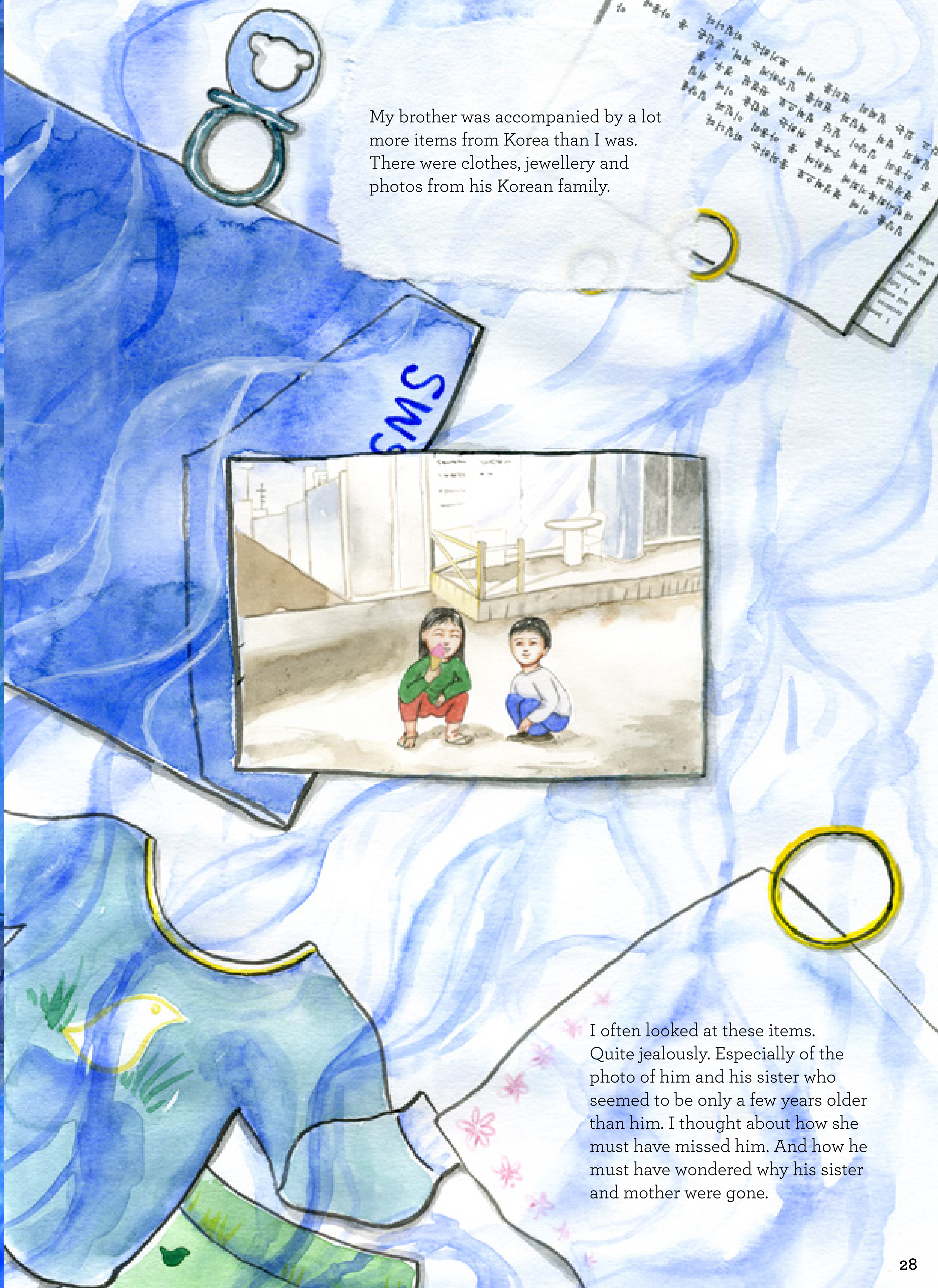
However, there were two things that would make him hysterical.

He was very afraid of water, and would scream when my parents tried to bathe him.

He was afraid of being left alone. Even for a couple of minutes. Whenever my parents would walk out the door to go outside, his face would freeze and he would panic.

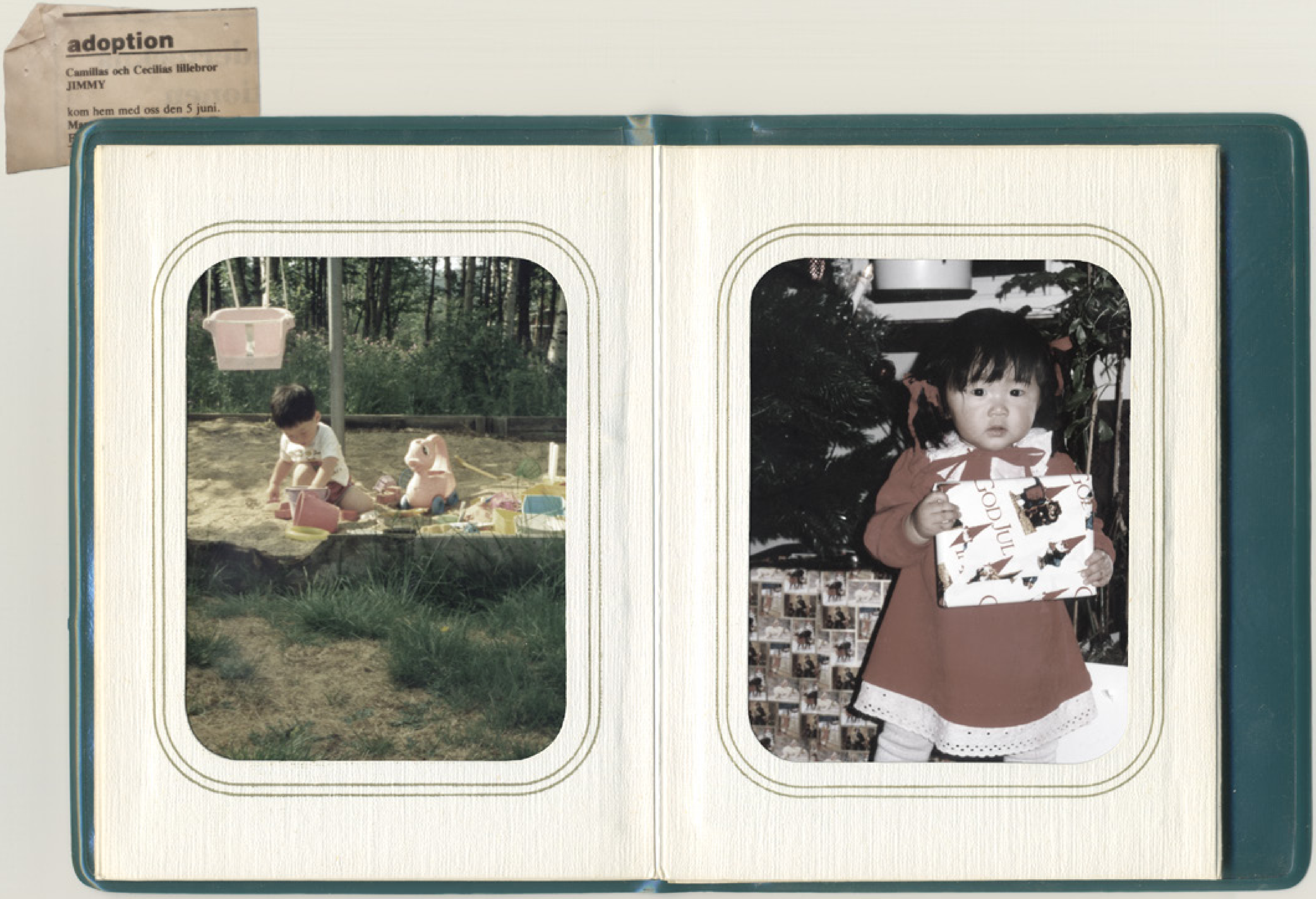
We knew nothing about his past life or what he had been through.

There was only the adoption documents to resort to with information, thin as the paper.



My brother was accompanied by a lot more items from Korea than I was. There were clothes, jewellery and photos from his Korean family.

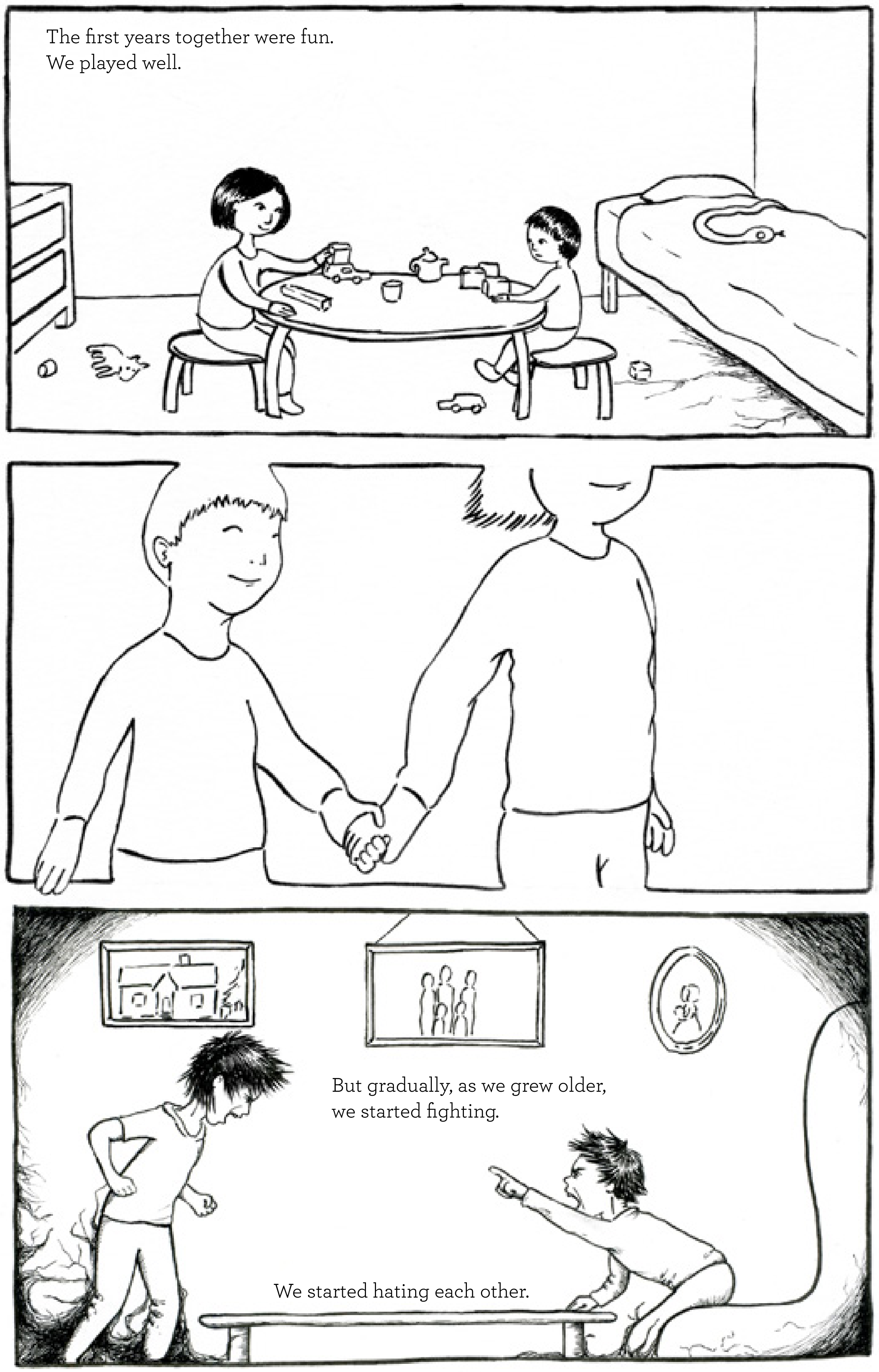
I often looked at these items. Quite jealously. Especially of the photo of him and his sister who seemed to be only a few years older than him. I thought about how she must have missed him. And how he must have wondered why his sister and mother were gone.

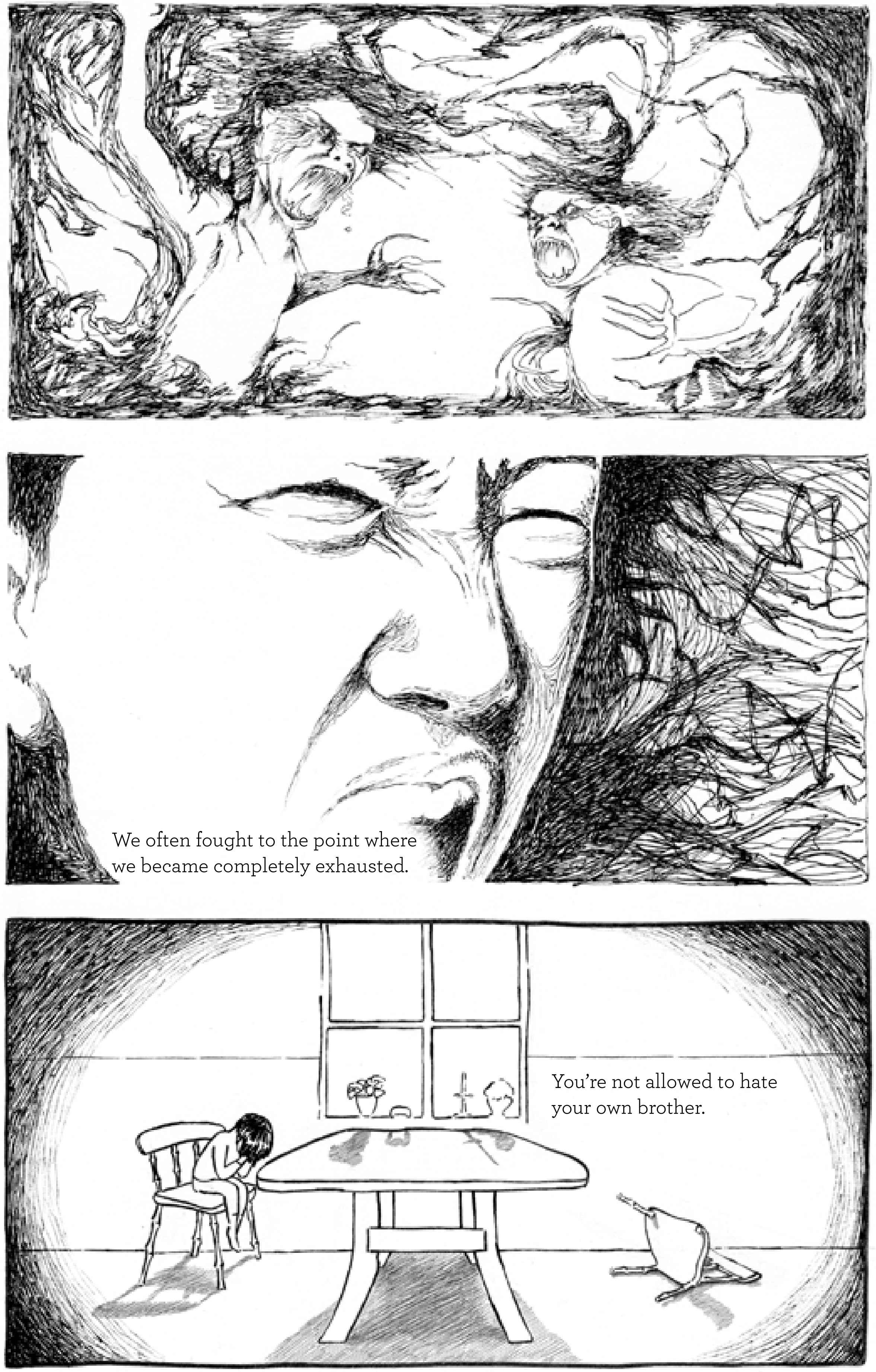


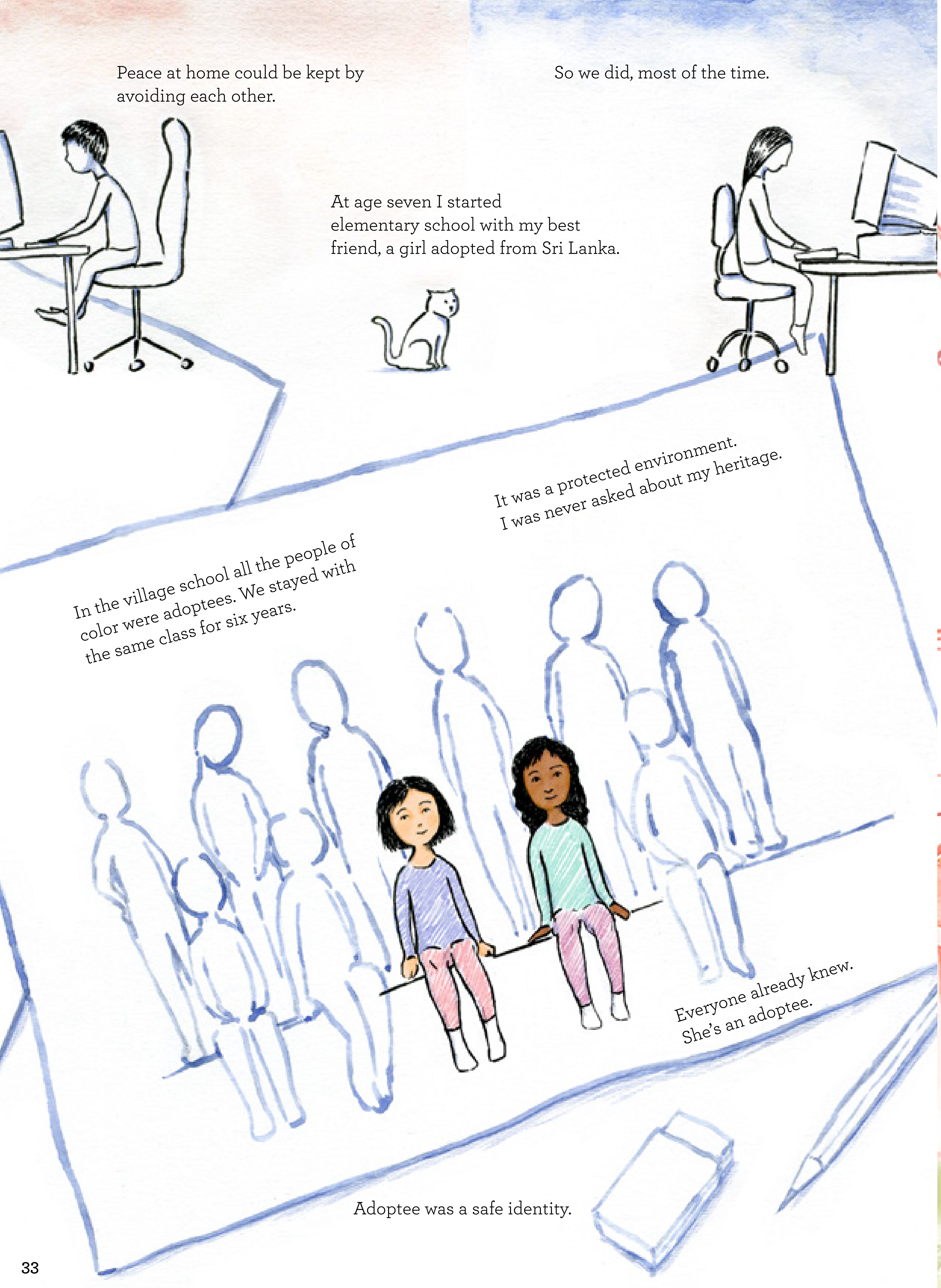
adoption

Camillas och Cecilias lillebror
JIMMY

kom hem med oss den 5 juni.
Ma


The first years together were fun.
We played well.
But gradually, as we grew older,
we started fighting.
We started hating each other.


We often fought to the point where
we became completely exhausted.
You're not allowed to hate
your own brother.



Peace at home could be kept by avoiding each other.

So we did, most of the time.

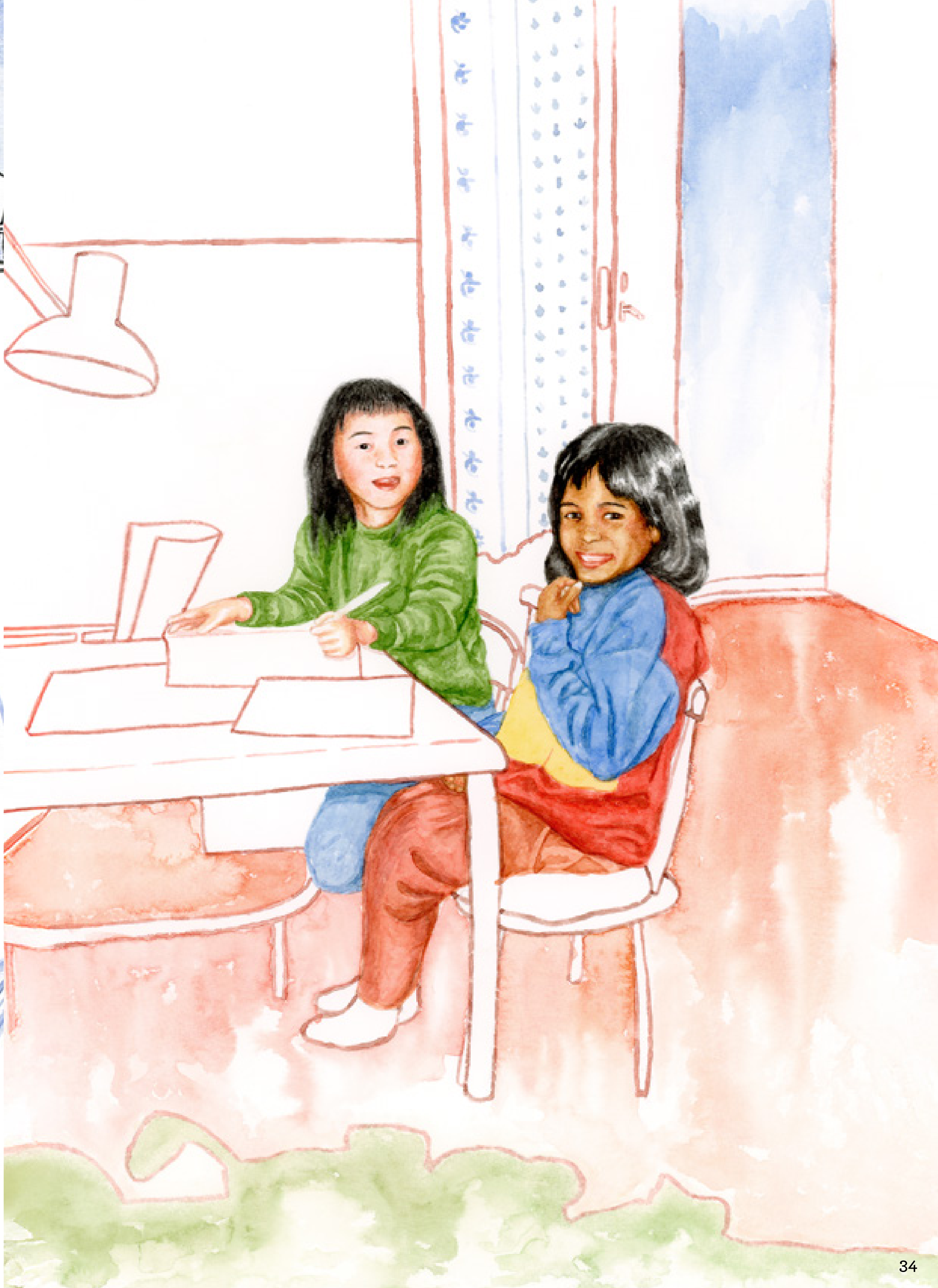
At age seven I started elementary school with my best friend, a girl adopted from Sri Lanka.

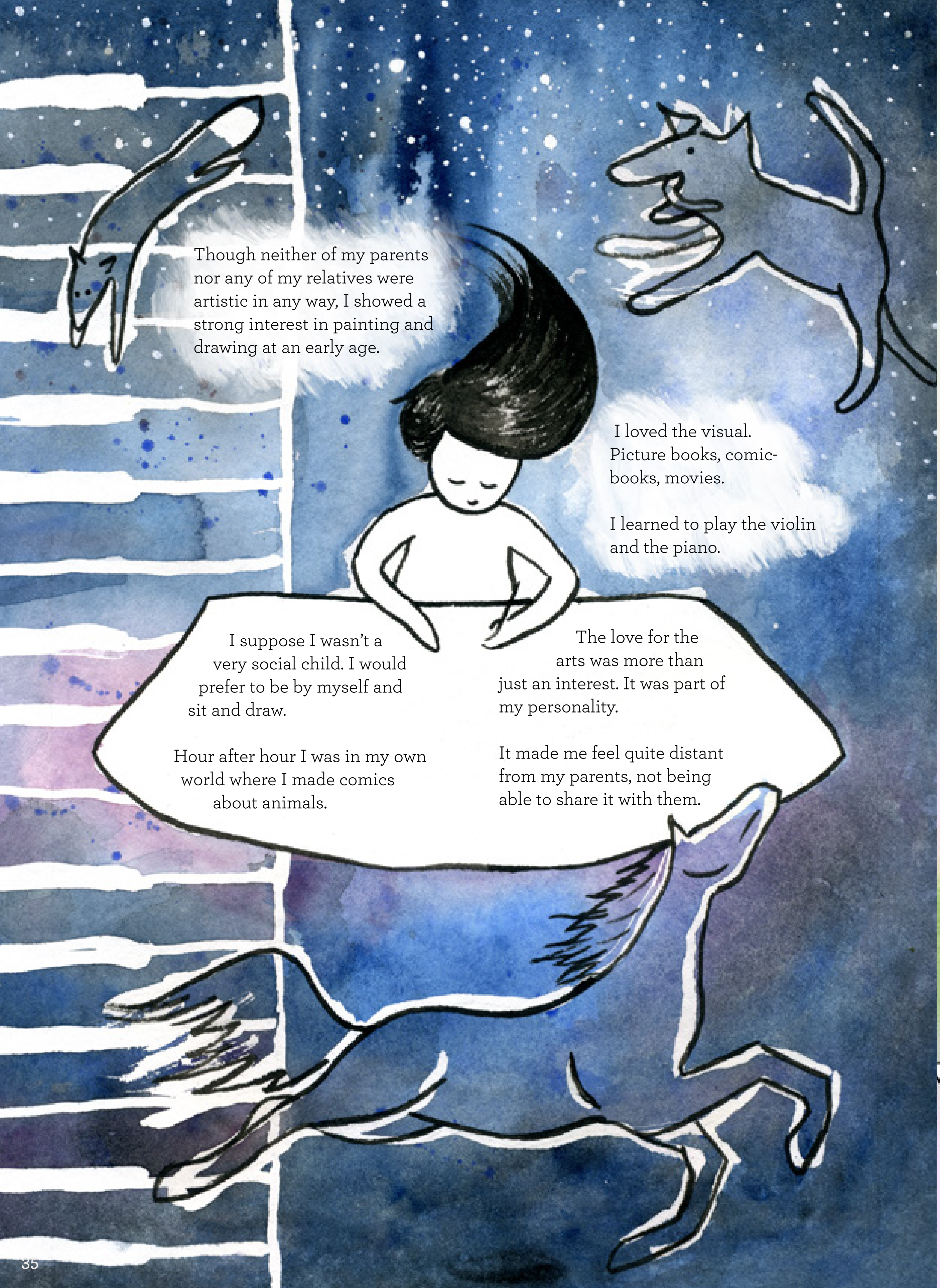
In the village school all the people of color were adoptees. We stayed with the same class for six years.

It was a protected environment. I was never asked about my heritage.

Everyone already knew. She's an adoptee.

Adoptee was a safe identity.





Though neither of my parents nor any of my relatives were artistic in any way, I showed a strong interest in painting and drawing at an early age.

I loved the visual. Picture books, comic-books, movies.

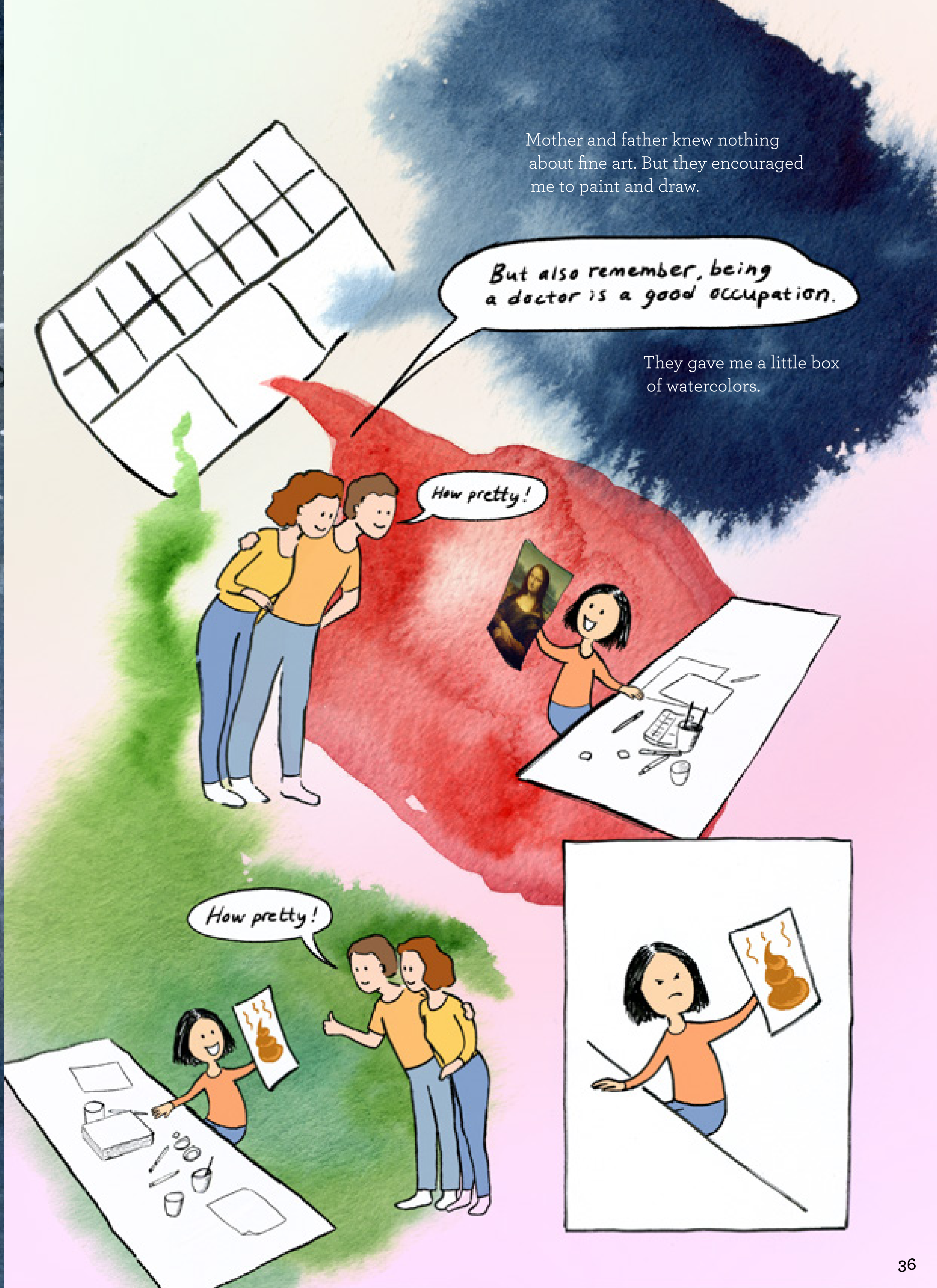
I learned to play the violin and the piano.

I suppose I wasn't a very social child. I would prefer to be by myself and sit and draw.

Hour after hour I was in my own world where I made comics about animals.

The love for the arts was more than just an interest. It was part of my personality.

It made me feel quite distant from my parents, not being able to share it with them.

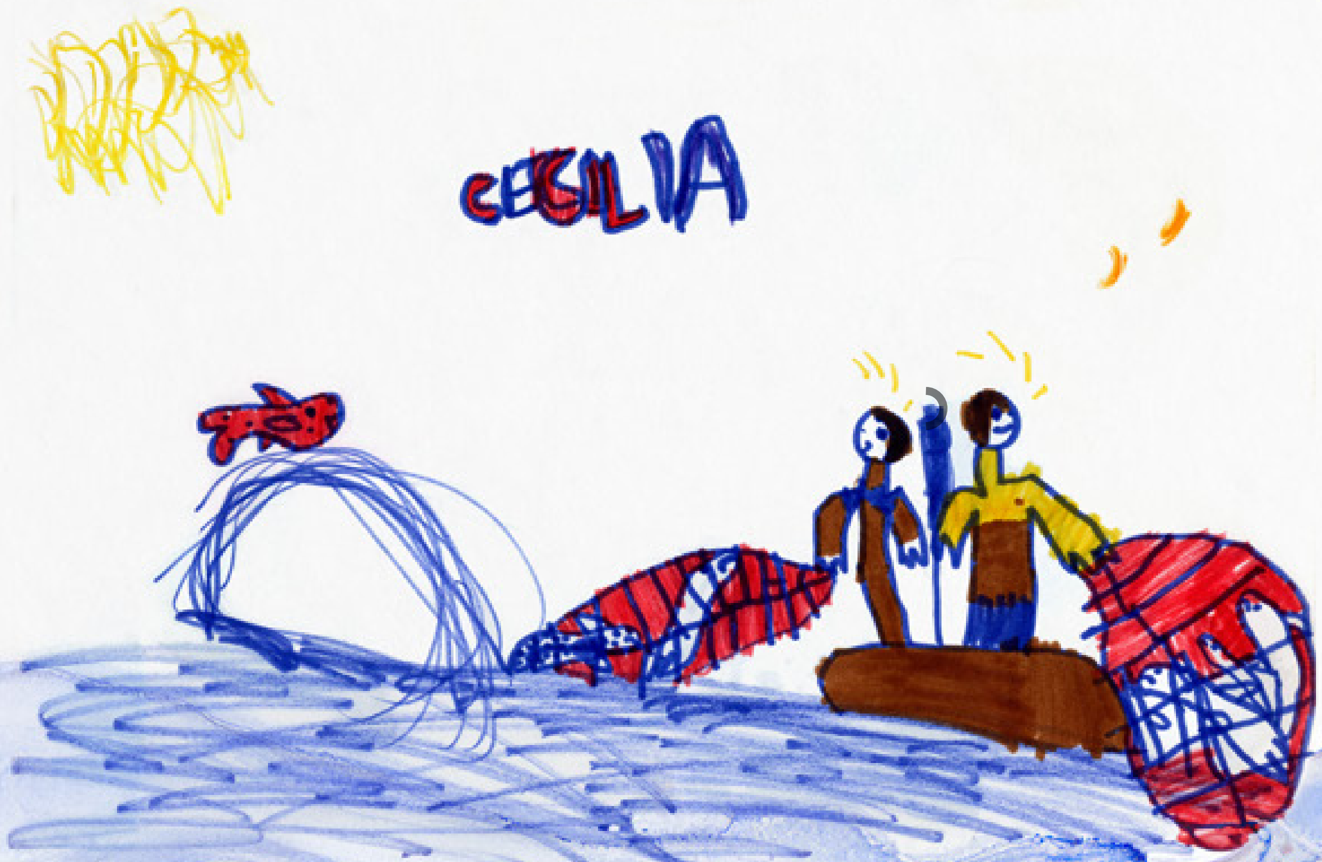


Mother and father knew nothing about fine art. But they encouraged me to paint and draw.

But also remember, being a doctor is a good occupation.
How pretty!

They gave me a little box of watercolors.

How pretty!

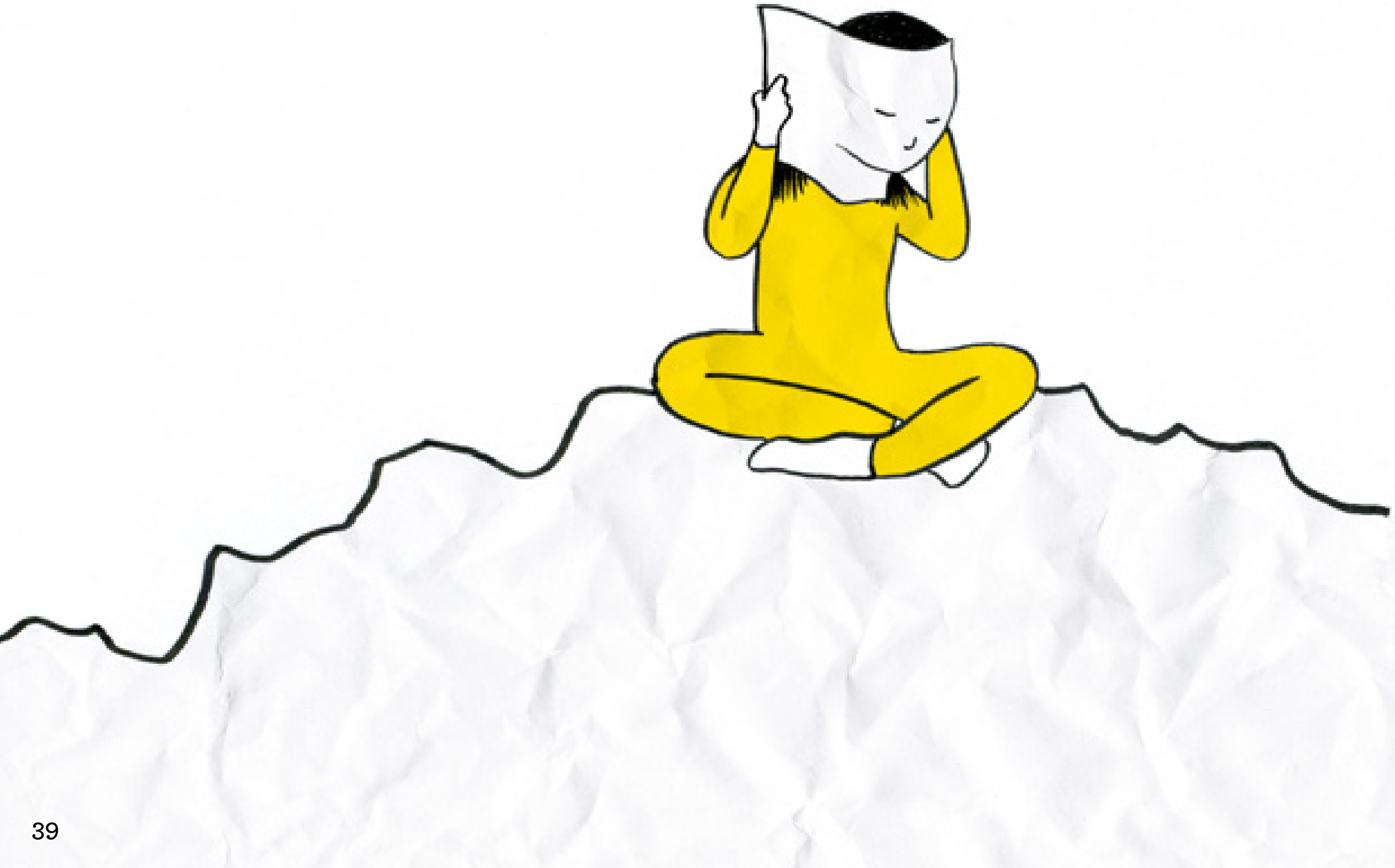


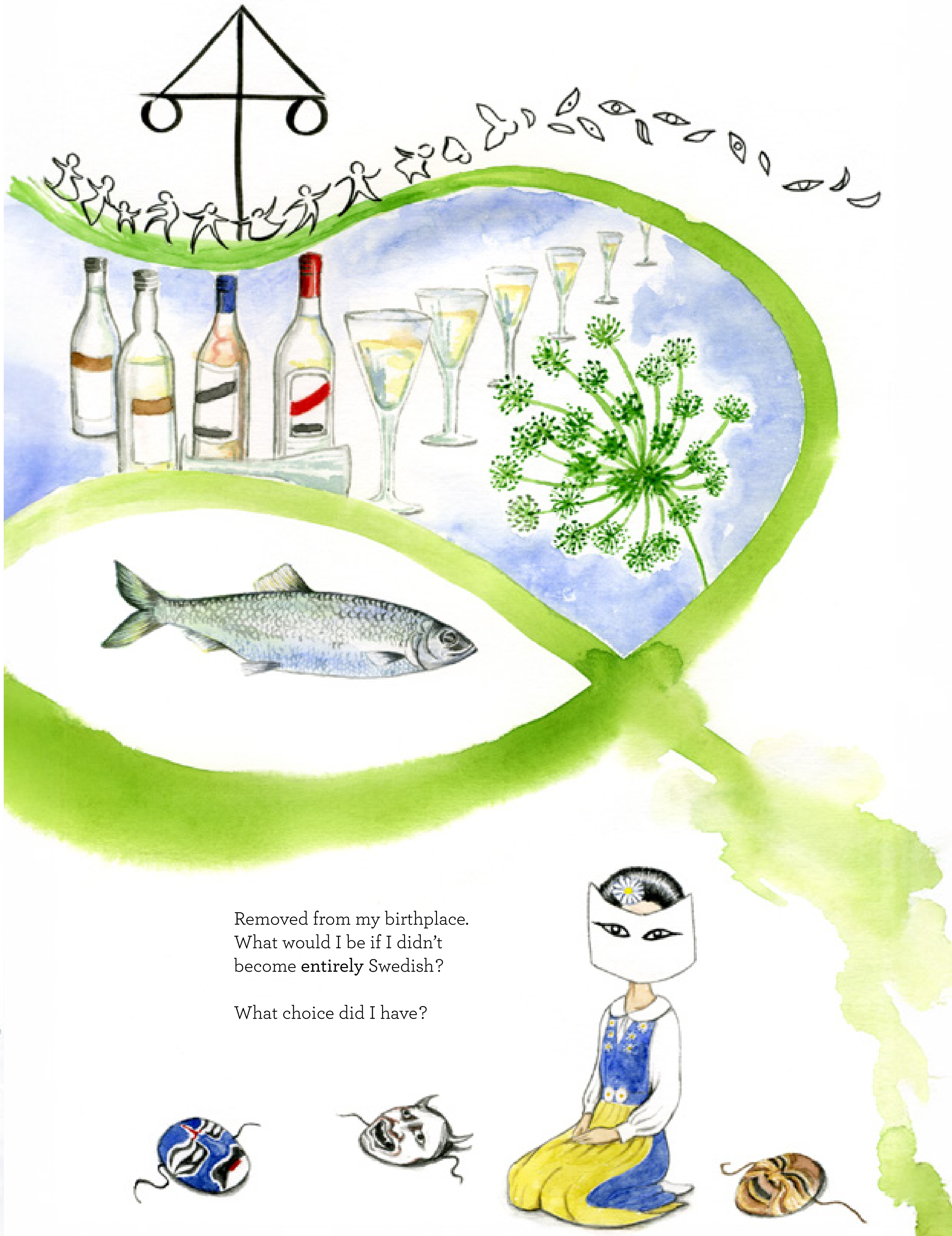
Church preschool
Age 4-5

Baby Moses was put in a basket on the river Nile.
the water carried him
from one life
to another.

Since there's rarely any background
information of the adoptees' former
lives, we're viewed as blank papers.
Ready to be re-written, start a new life.
Assimilate. Re-learn.

Forget.
Become.
Fit in.





Removed from my birthplace.
What would I be if I didn't
become **entirely** Swedish?

What choice did I have?

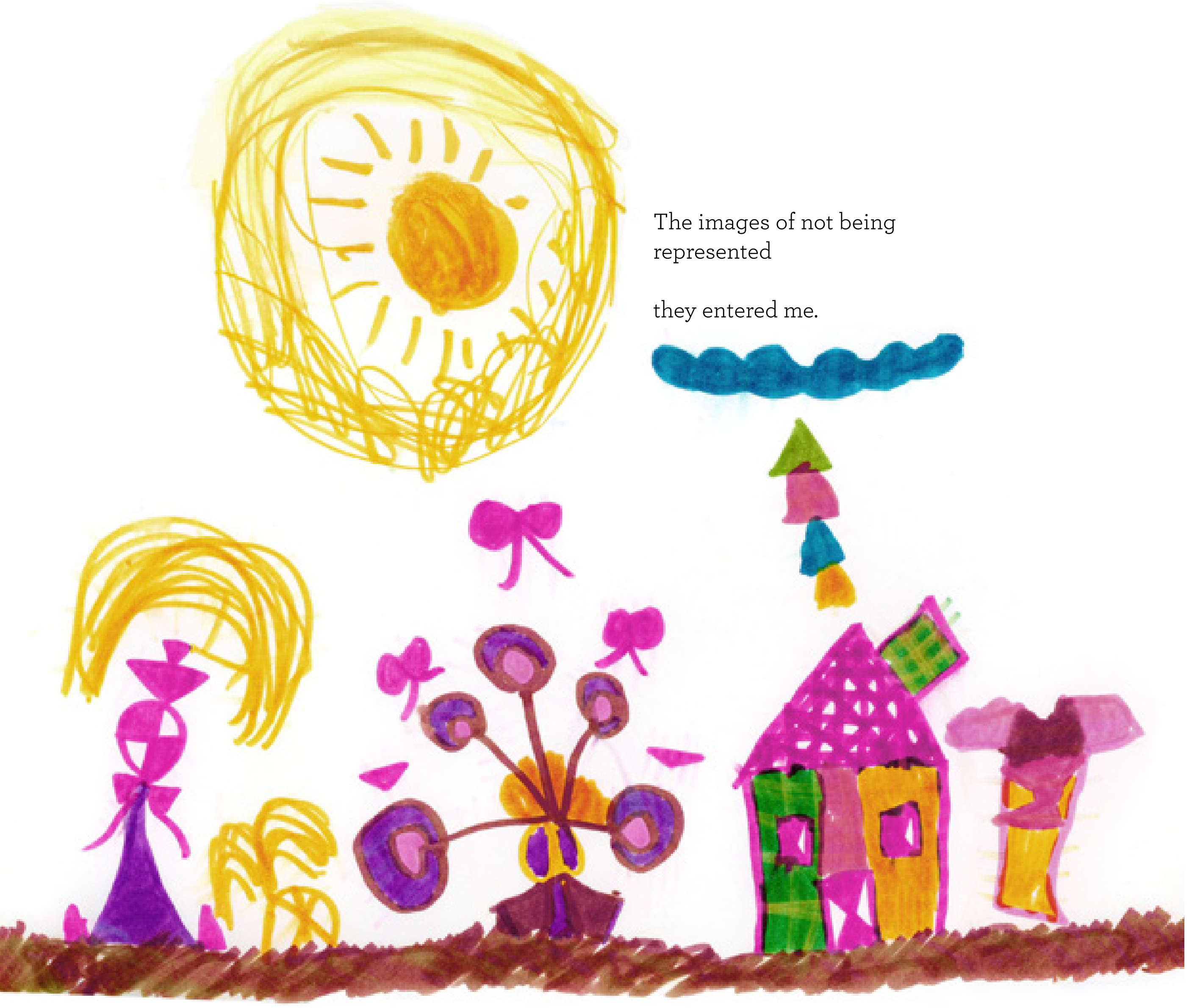
I often heard from adults with nothing
but good intentions that there was no
difference between me and
my white family.

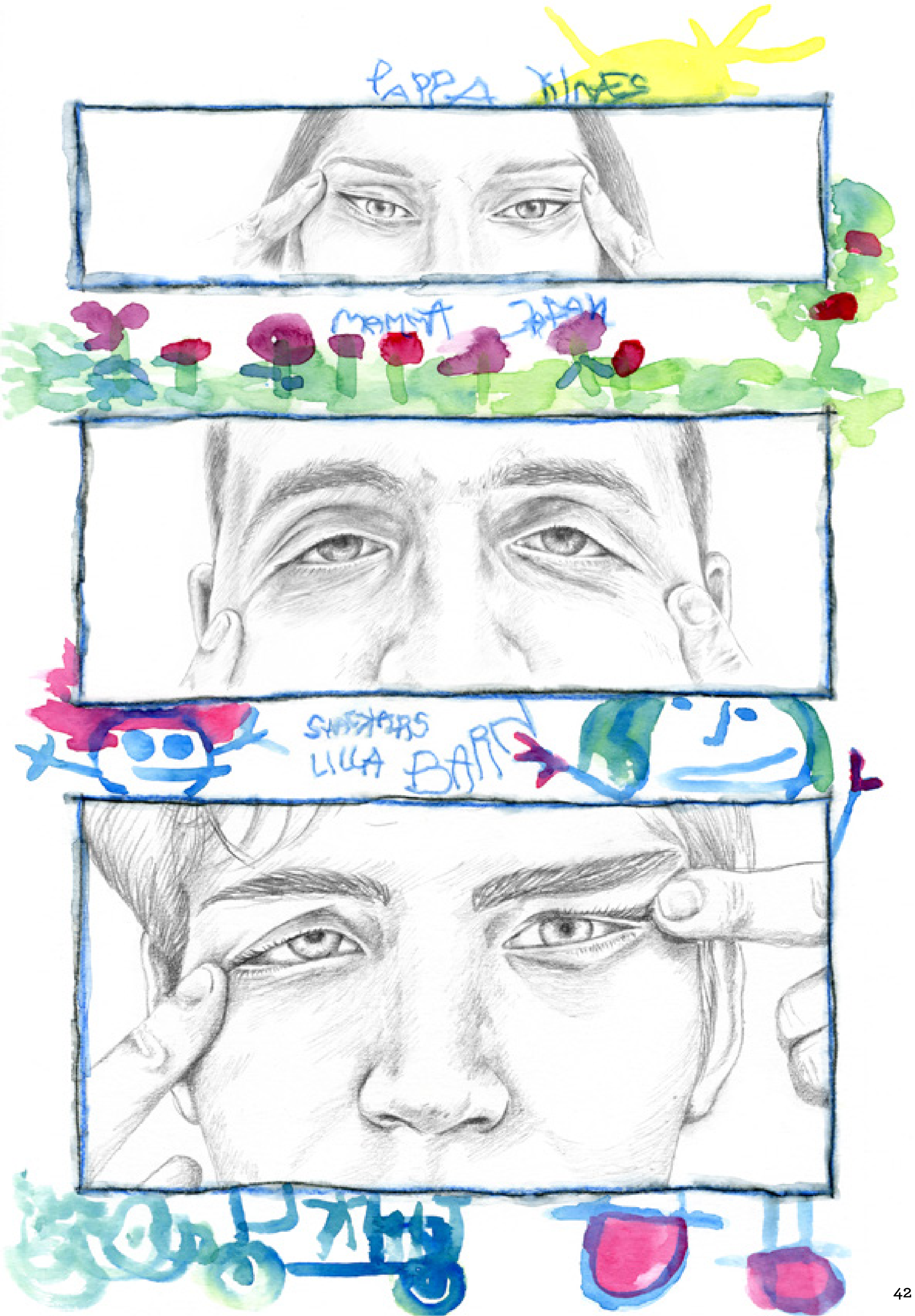
Or that I was just like anyone else
in my class.

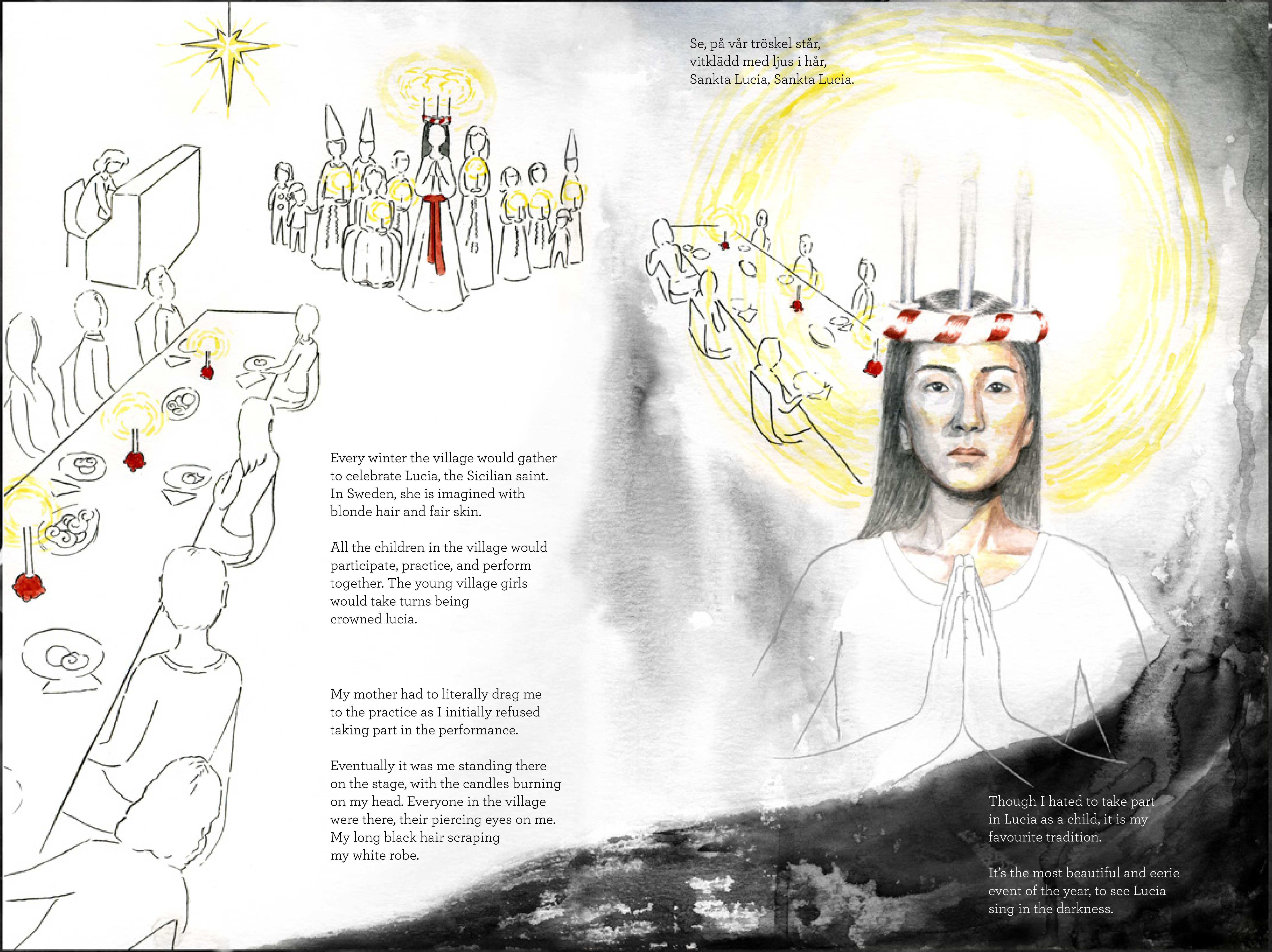
I was like everyone else. Yet rarely
represented on TV, in films or books.

The images of not being
represented

they entered me.







Every winter the village would gather
to celebrate Lucia, the Sicilian saint.
In Sweden, she is imagined with
blonde hair and fair skin.

All the children in the village would
participate, practice, and perform
together. The young village girls
would take turns being
crowned lucia.

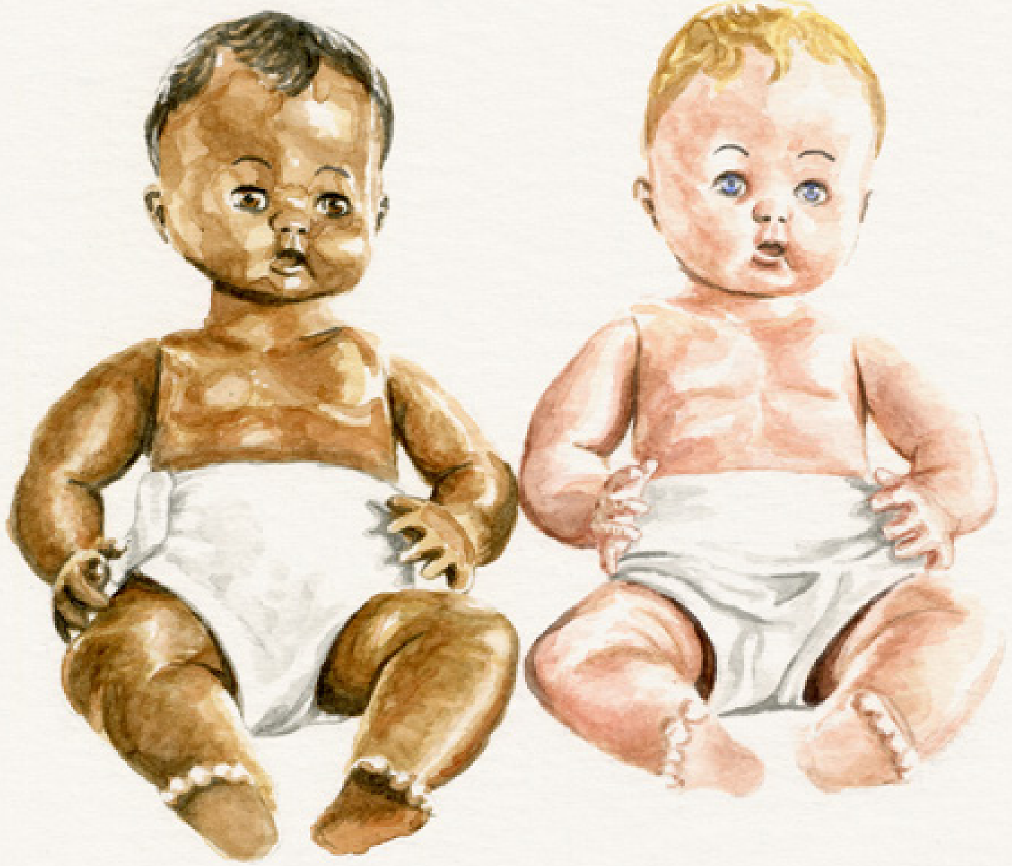
My mother had to literally drag me
to the practice as I initially refused
taking part in the performance.

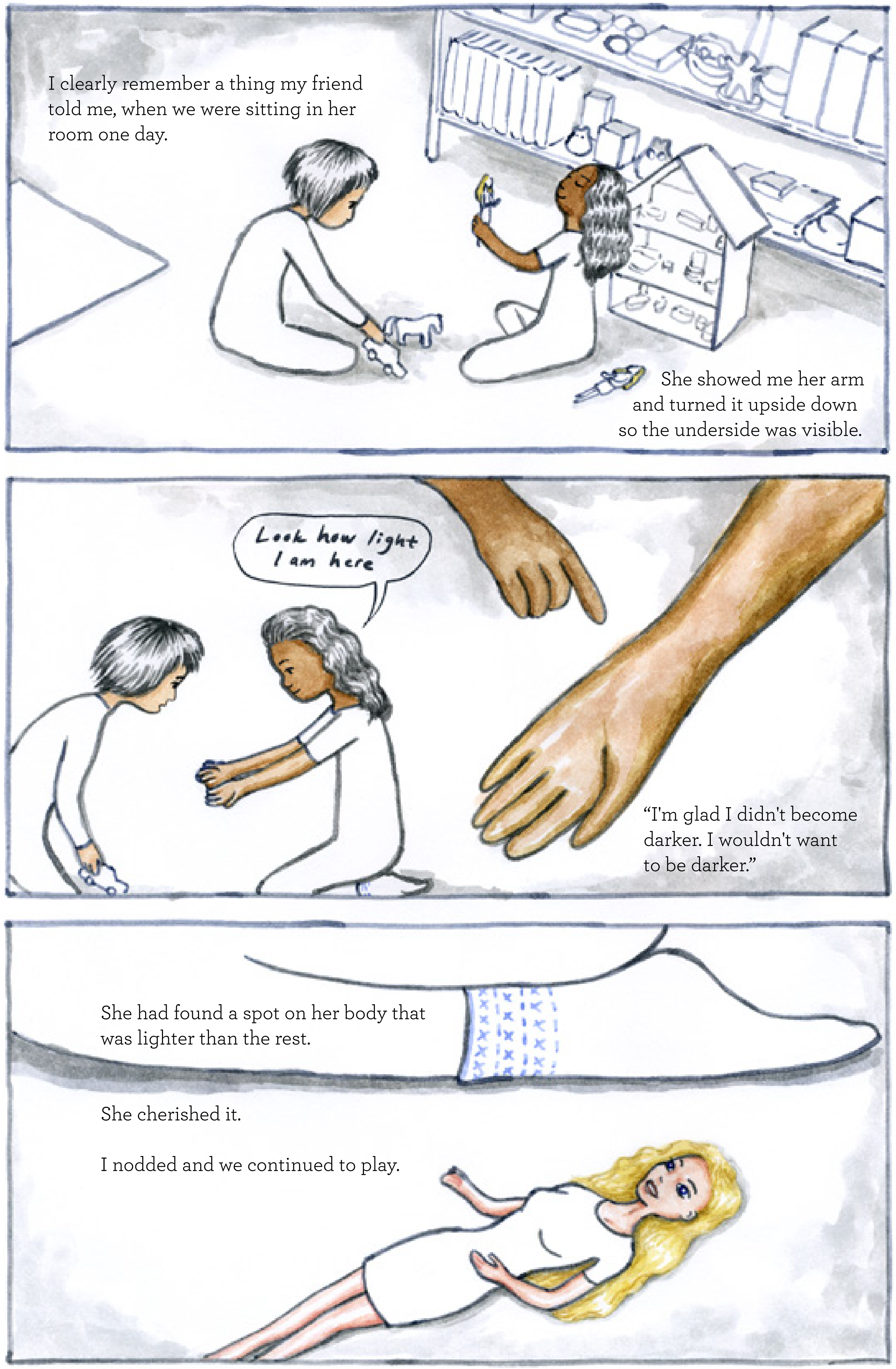
Eventually it was me standing there
on the stage, with the candles burning
on my head. Everyone in the village
were there, their piercing eyes on me.
My long black hair scraping
my white robe.

Se, på vår tröskel står,
vitklädd med ljus i hår,
Sankta Lucia, Sankta Lucia.

Though I hated to take part
in Lucia as a child, it is my
favourite tradition.

It's the most beautiful and eerie
event of the year, to see Lucia
sing in the darkness.





I clearly remember a thing my friend told me, when we were sitting in her room one day.

She showed me her arm and turned it upside down so the underside was visible.

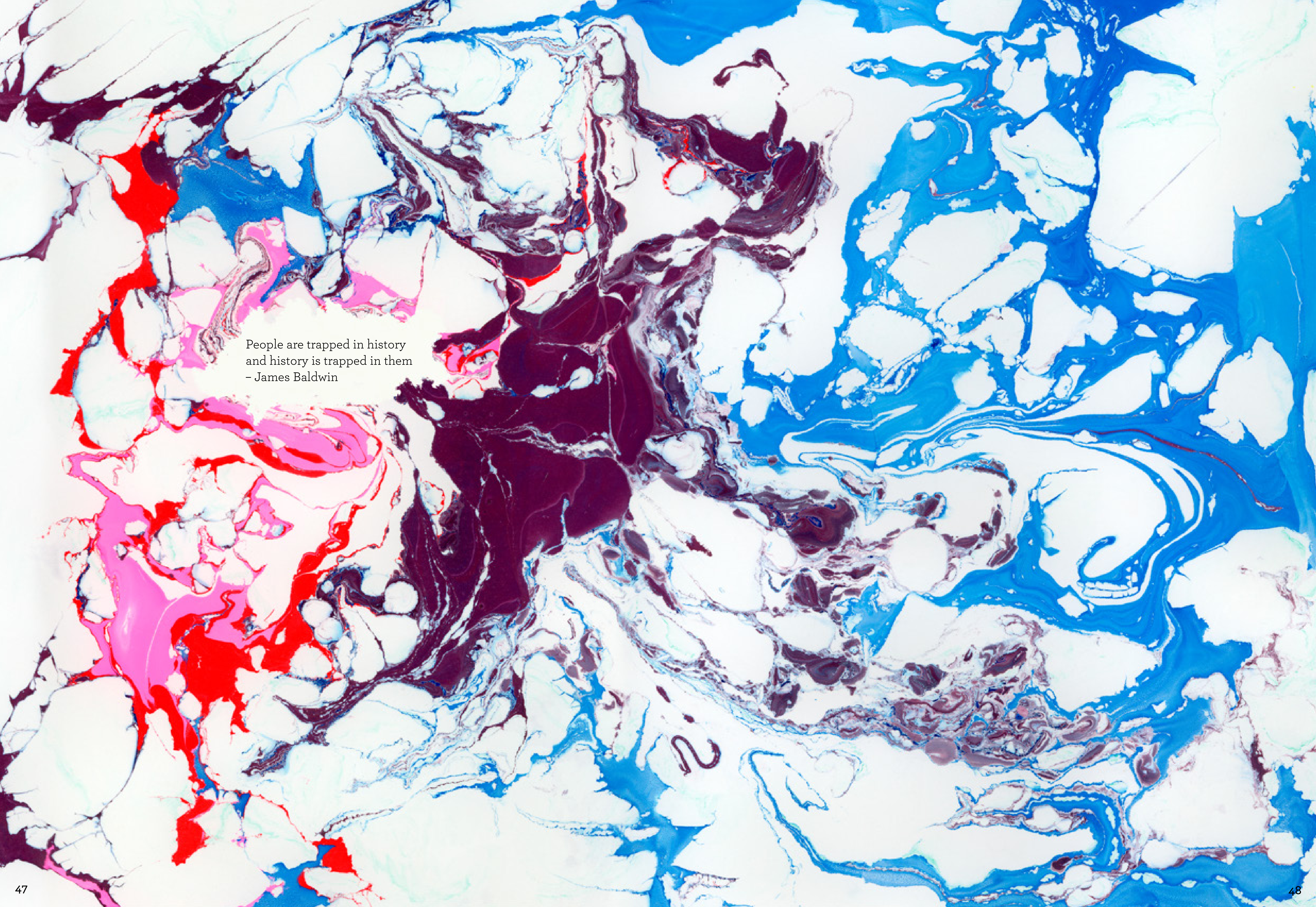
Look how light I am here

“I'm glad I didn't become darker. I wouldn't want to be darker.”

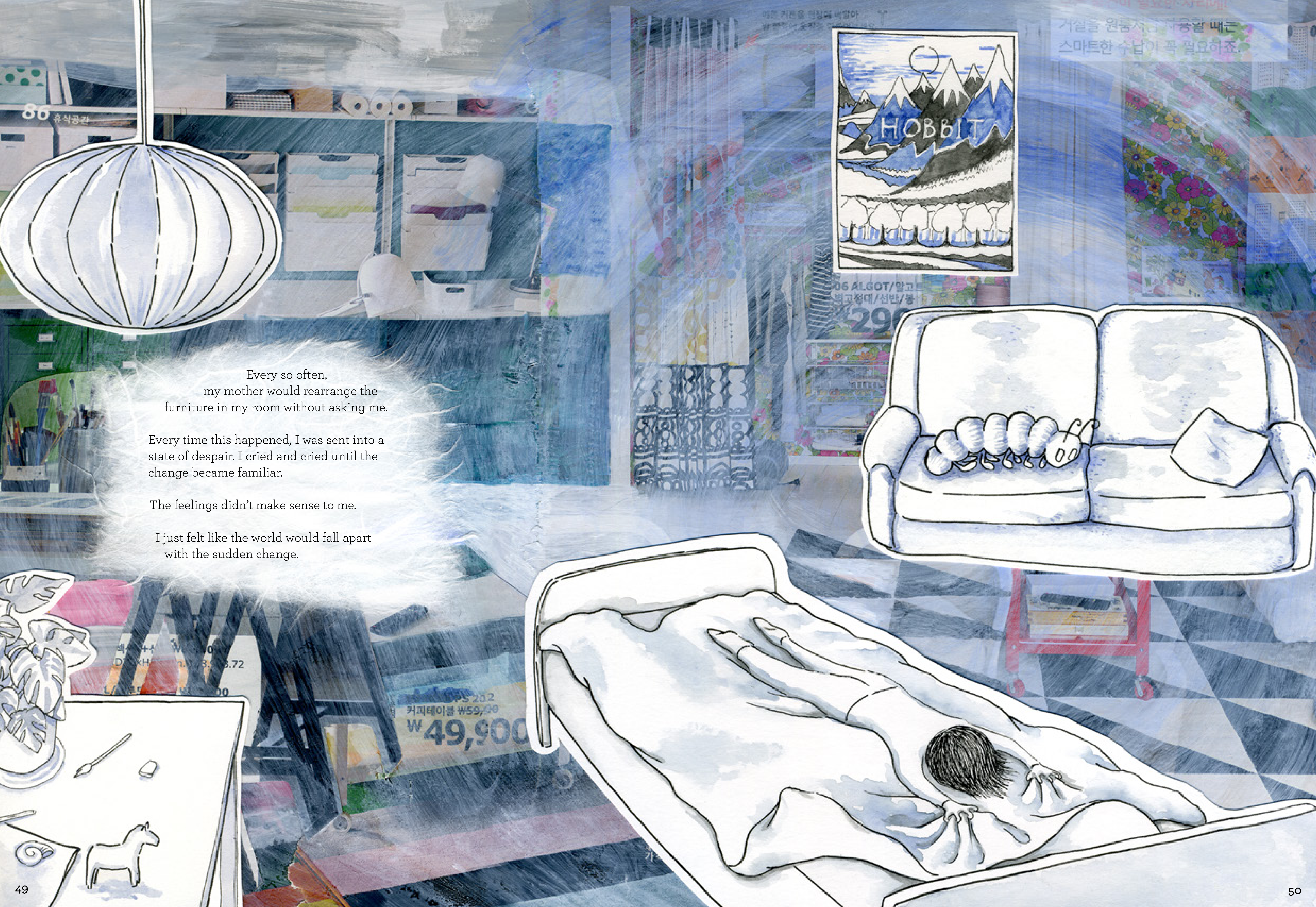
She had found a spot on her body that was lighter than the rest.

She cherished it.

I nodded and we continued to play.



People are trapped in history
and history is trapped in them
– James Baldwin



Every so often,
my mother would rearrange the
furniture in my room without asking me.

Every time this happened, I was sent into a
state of despair. I cried and cried until the
change became familiar.

The feelings didn't make sense to me.

I just felt like the world would fall apart
with the sudden change.

CAROLI LINNÆI
Equitis De Stella Polari,
Archiatri Regii, Med. & Botan. Profess. Upsal.;
Acad. Upsal. Holmens. Petropol. Berol. Imper.
Lond. Monspel. Tolos. Florent. Soc.

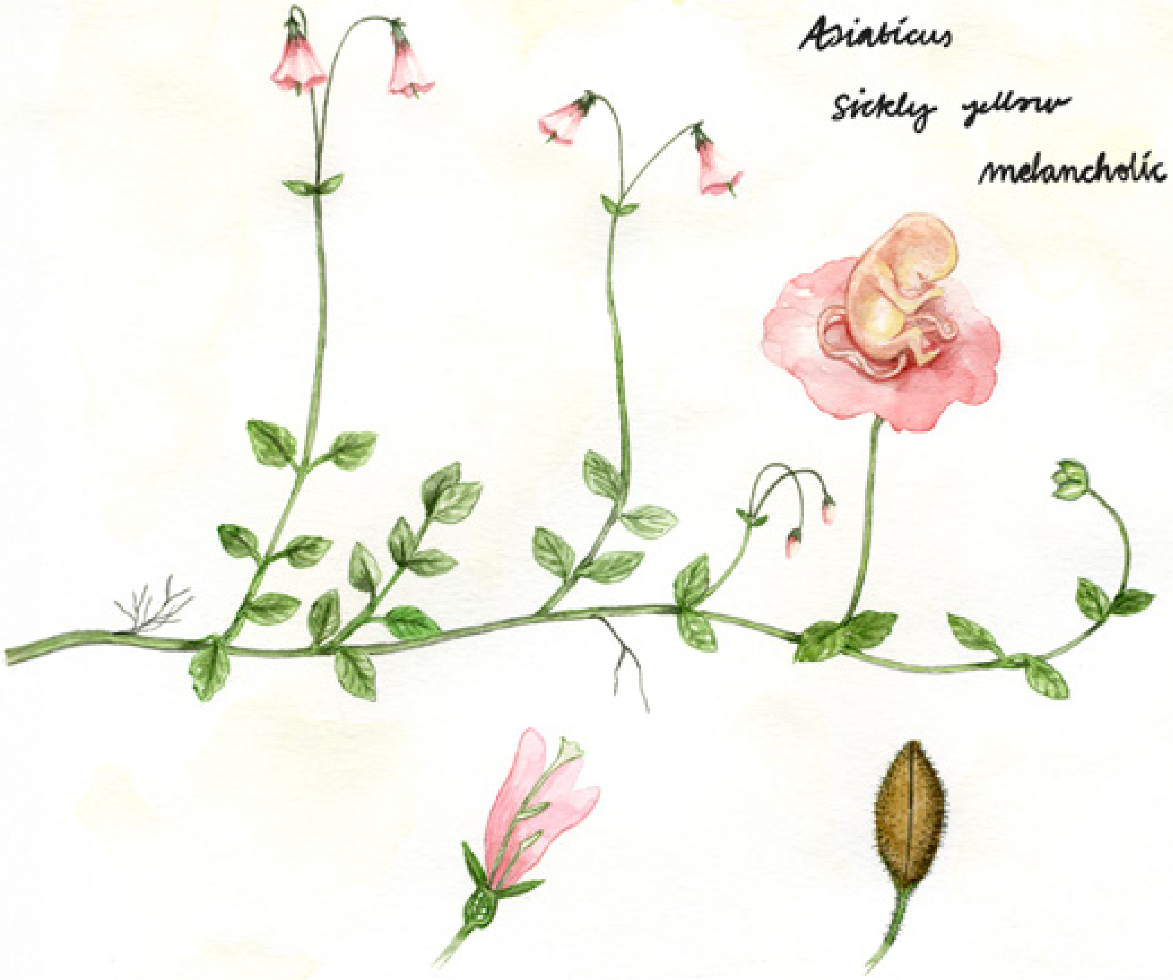
SYSTEMA NATURÆ

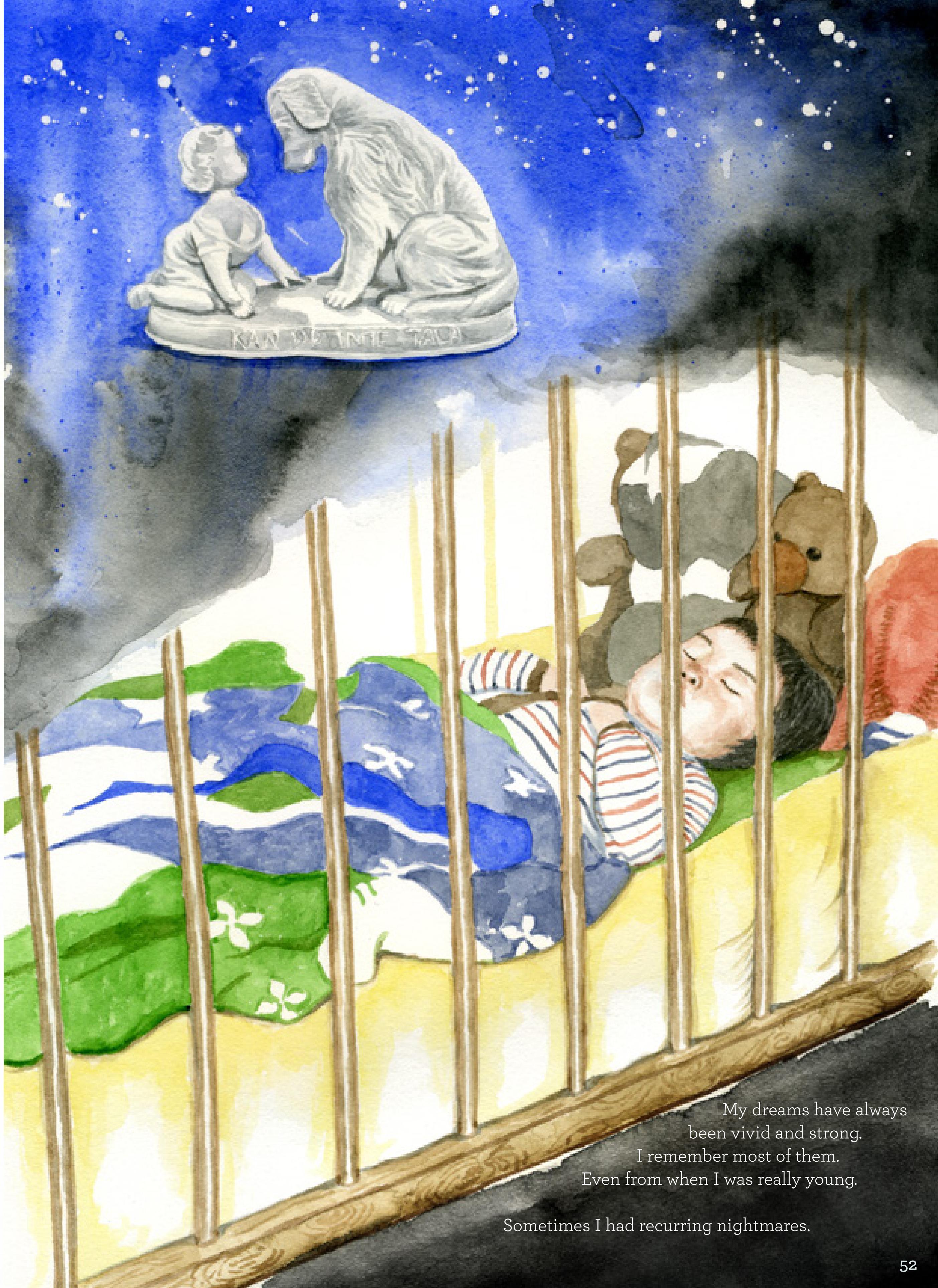
Per
REGNA TRIA NATURÆ,
Secundum
CLASSES, ORDINES,
GENERA, SPECIES,

Asiaticus

sickly yellow

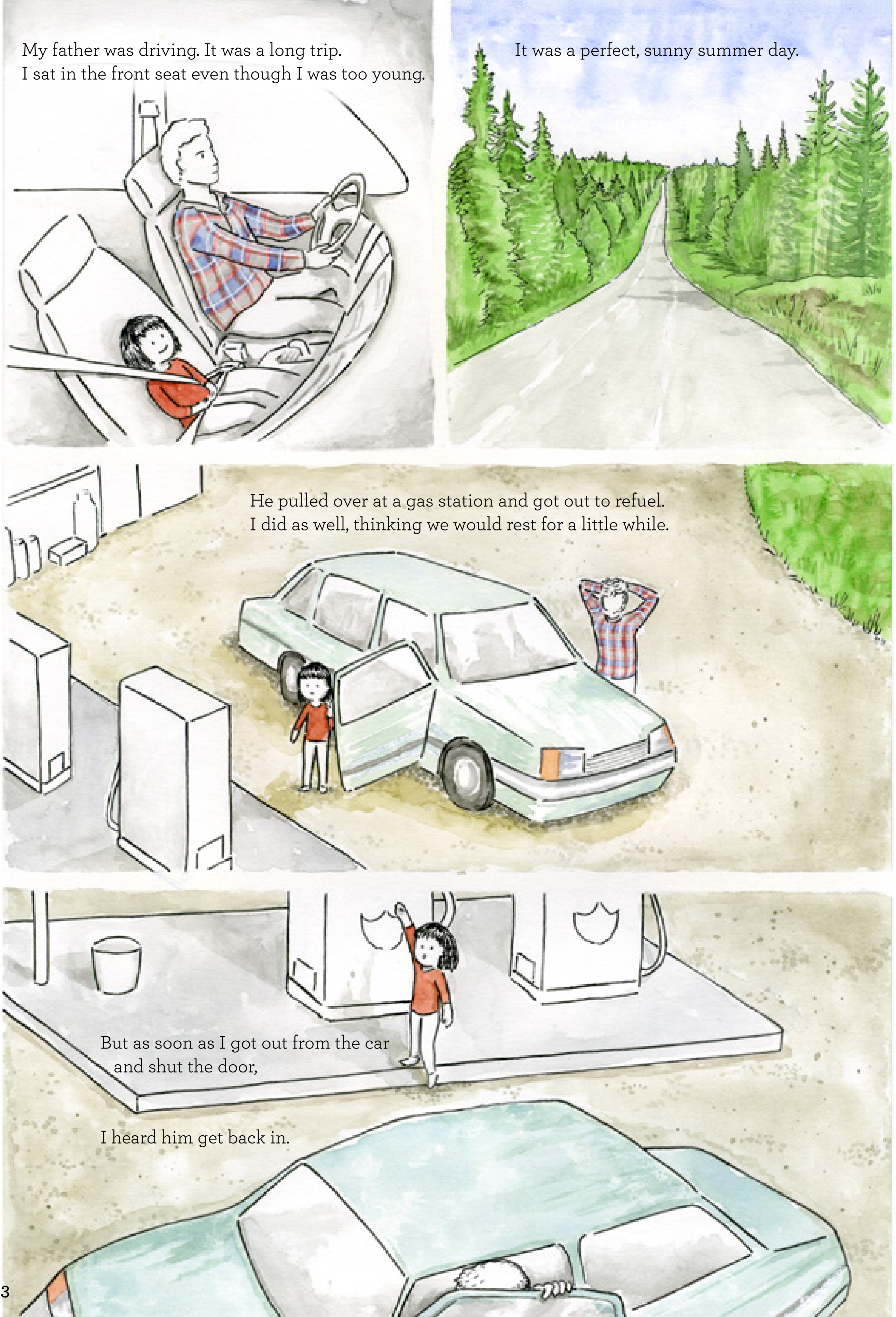
melancholic





My dreams have always
been vivid and strong.
I remember most of them.
Even from when I was really young.

Sometimes I had recurring nightmares.



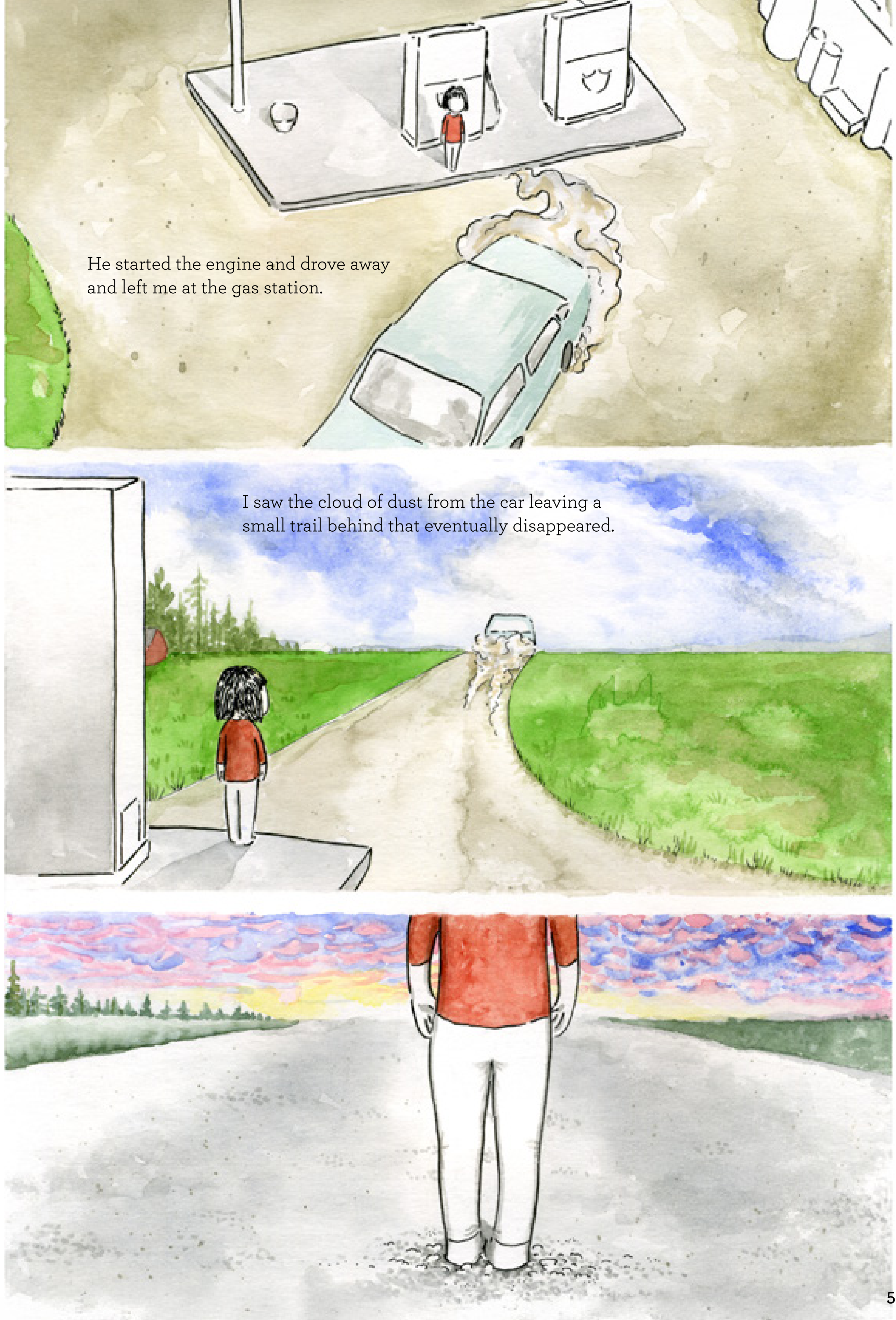
My father was driving. It was a long trip.
I sat in the front seat even though I was too young.

It was a perfect, sunny summer day.

He pulled over at a gas station and got out to refuel.
I did as well, thinking we would rest for a little while.

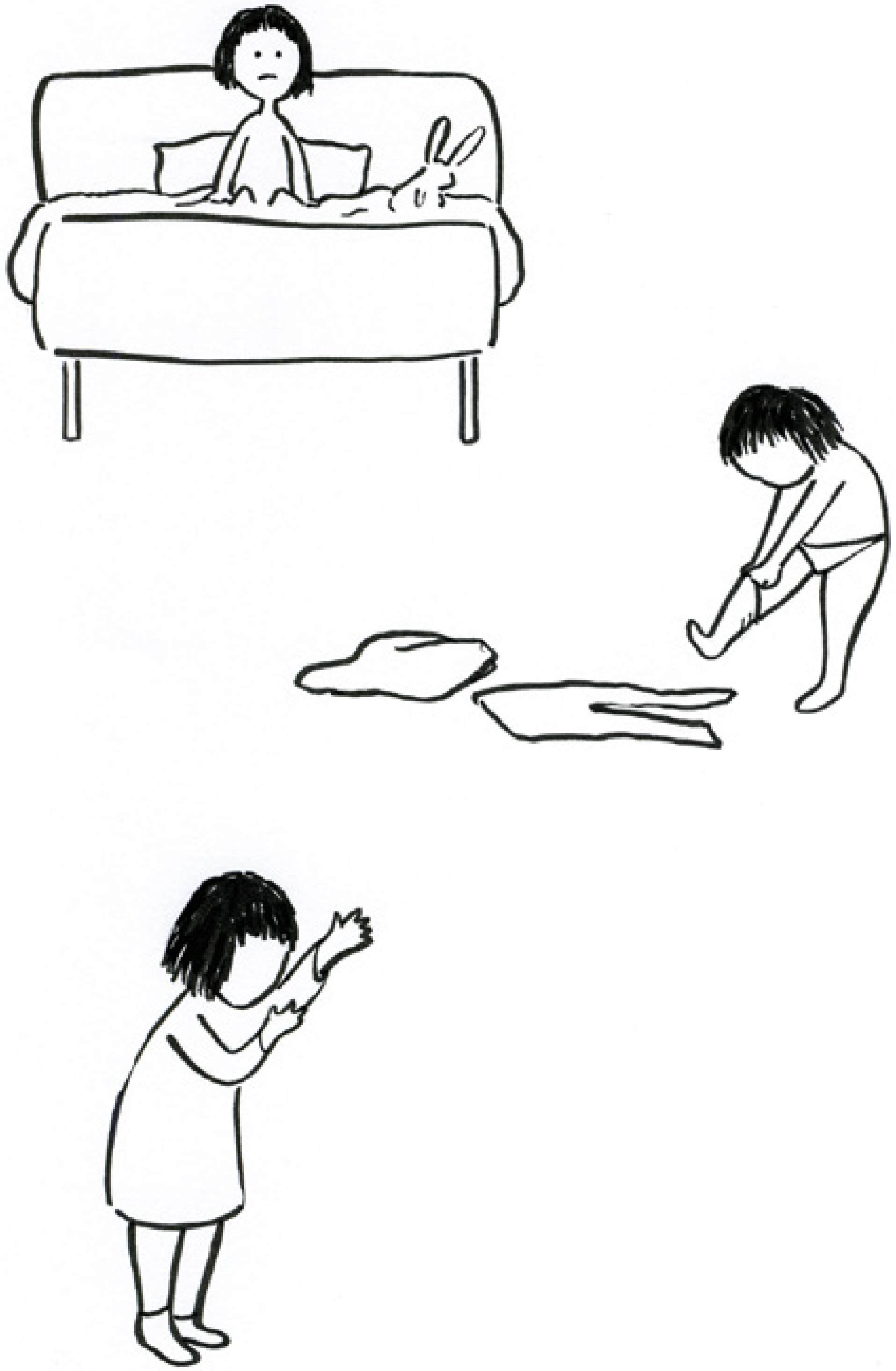
But as soon as I got out from the car
and shut the door,

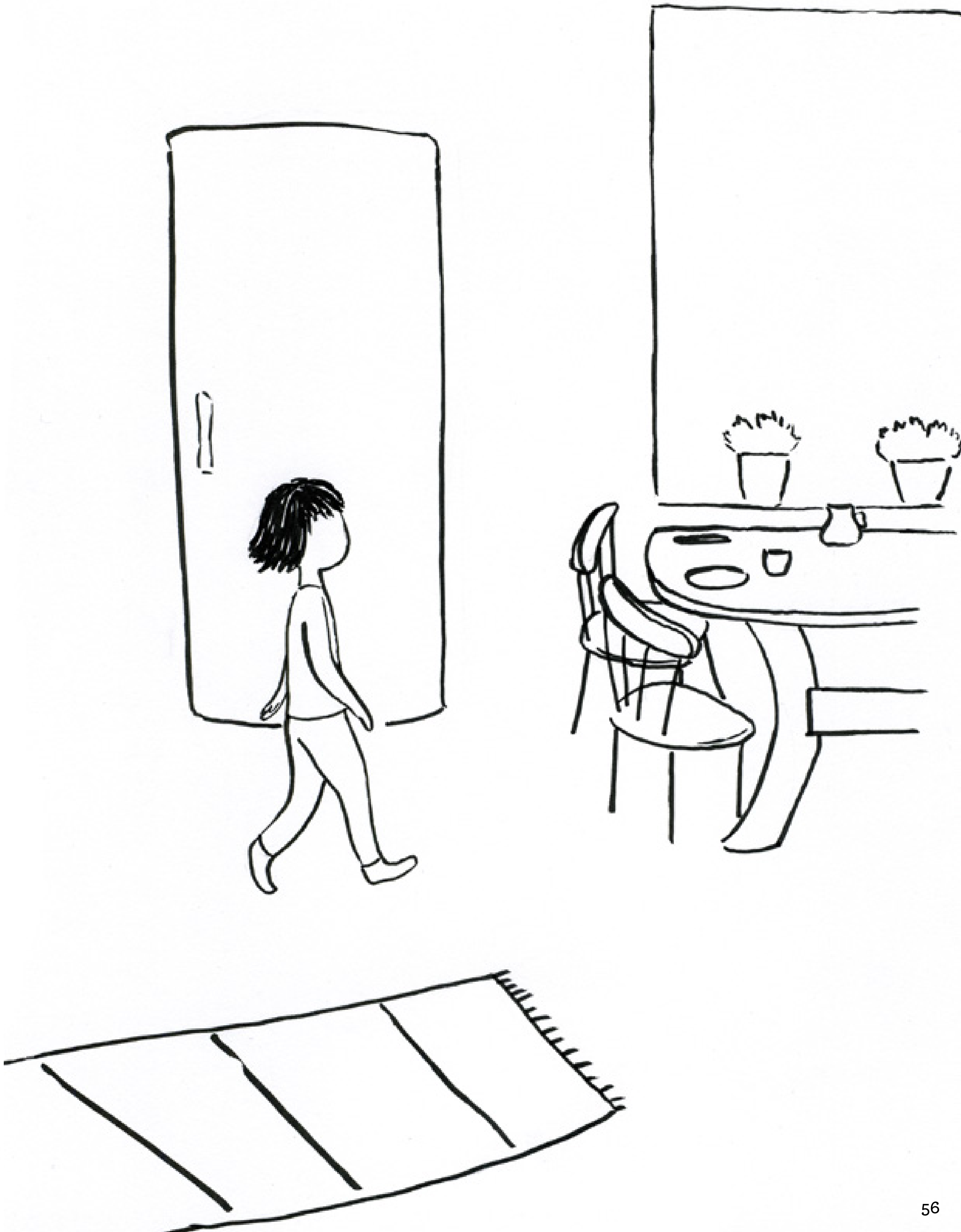
I heard him get back in.

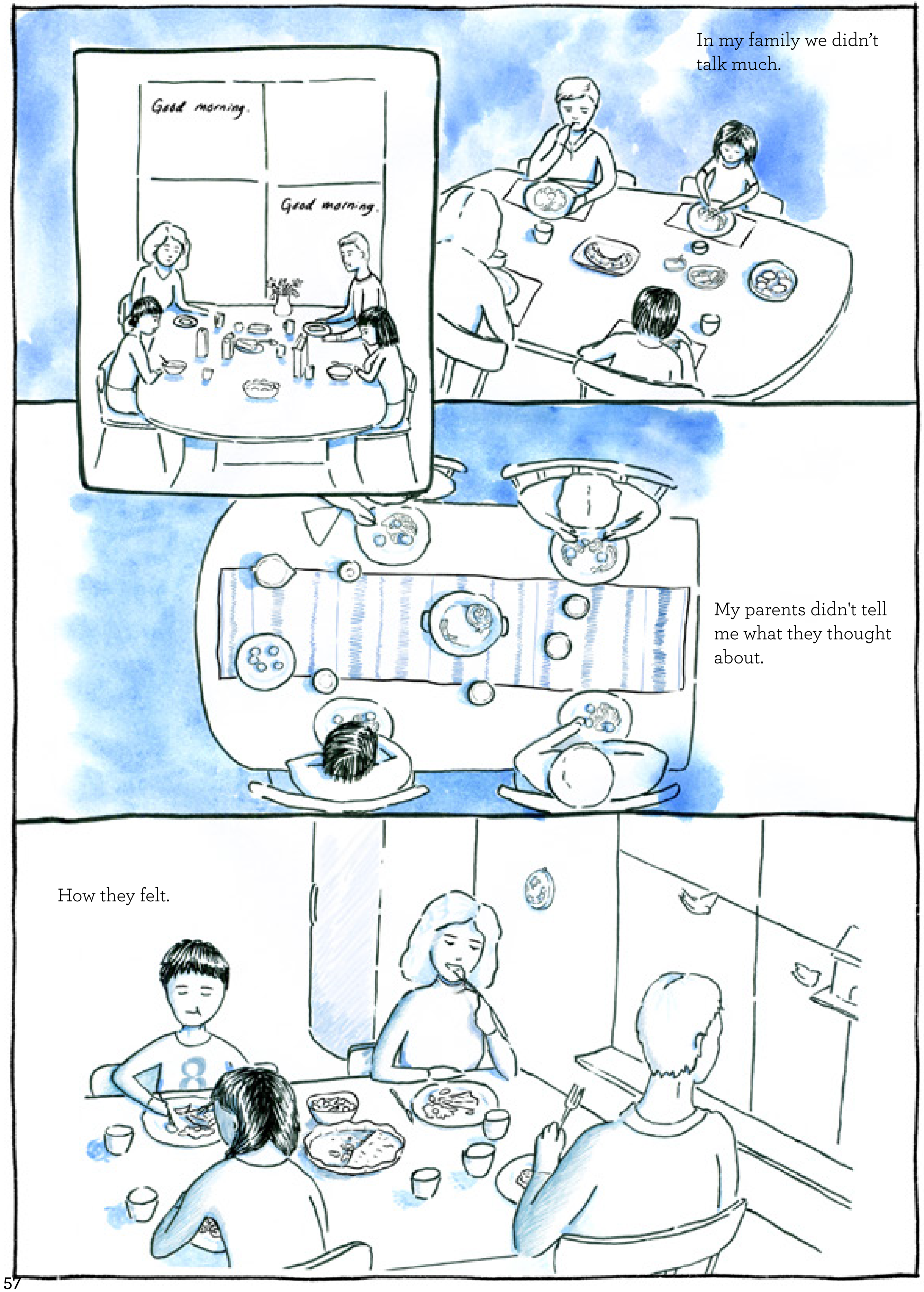


He started the engine and drove away
and left me at the gas station.

I saw the cloud of dust from the car leaving a
small trail behind that eventually disappeared.



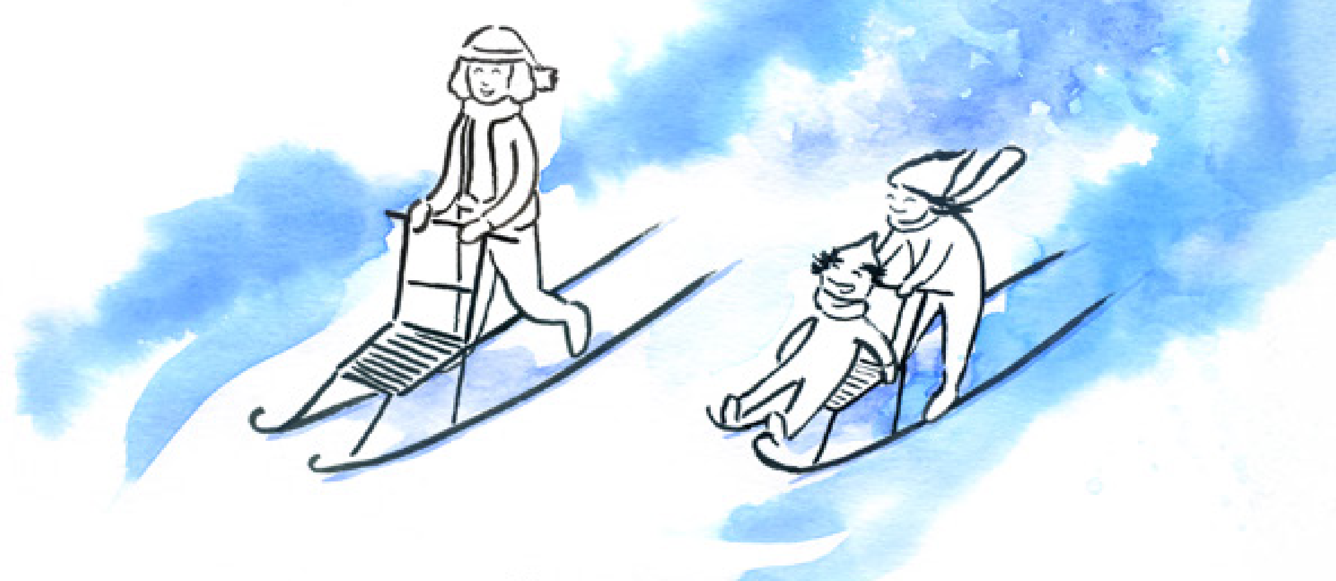



Good morning.
Good morning.

In my family we didn't
talk much.

My parents didn't tell
me what they thought
about.

How they felt.



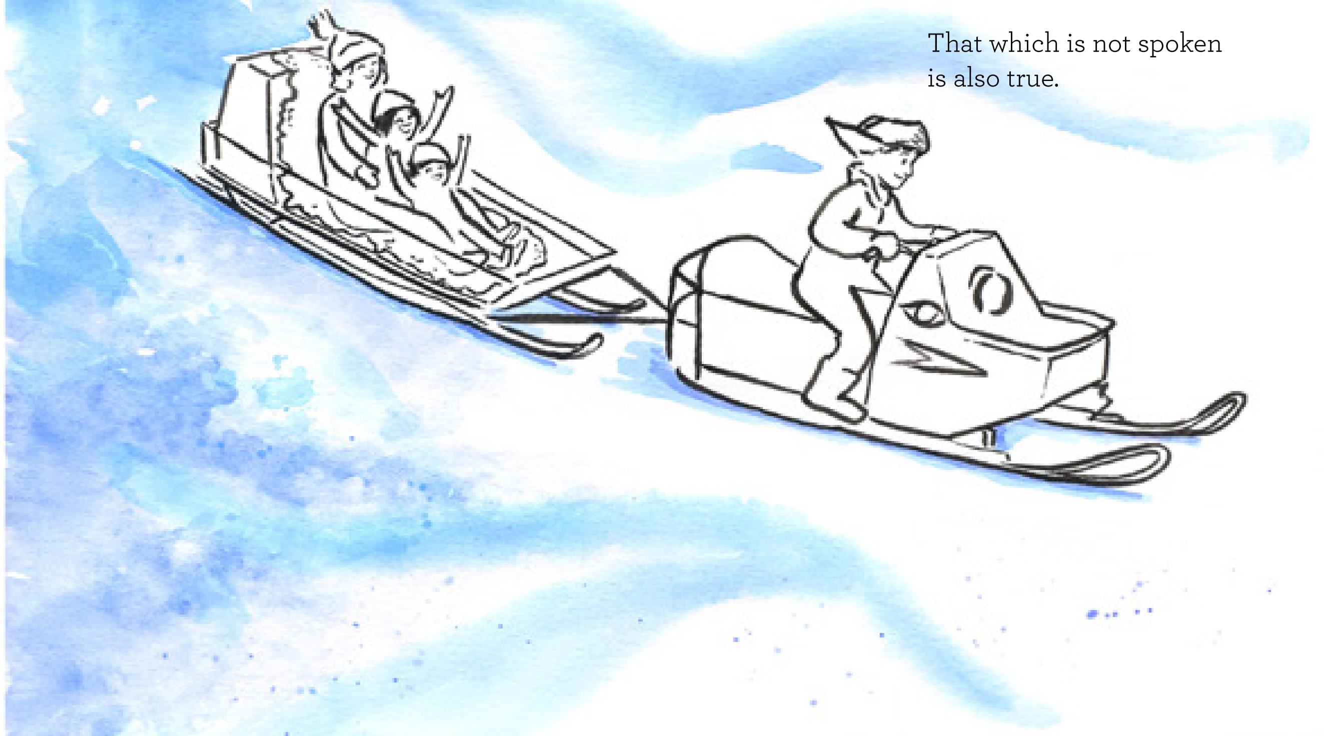
Maybe it's even true
that it's cultural.

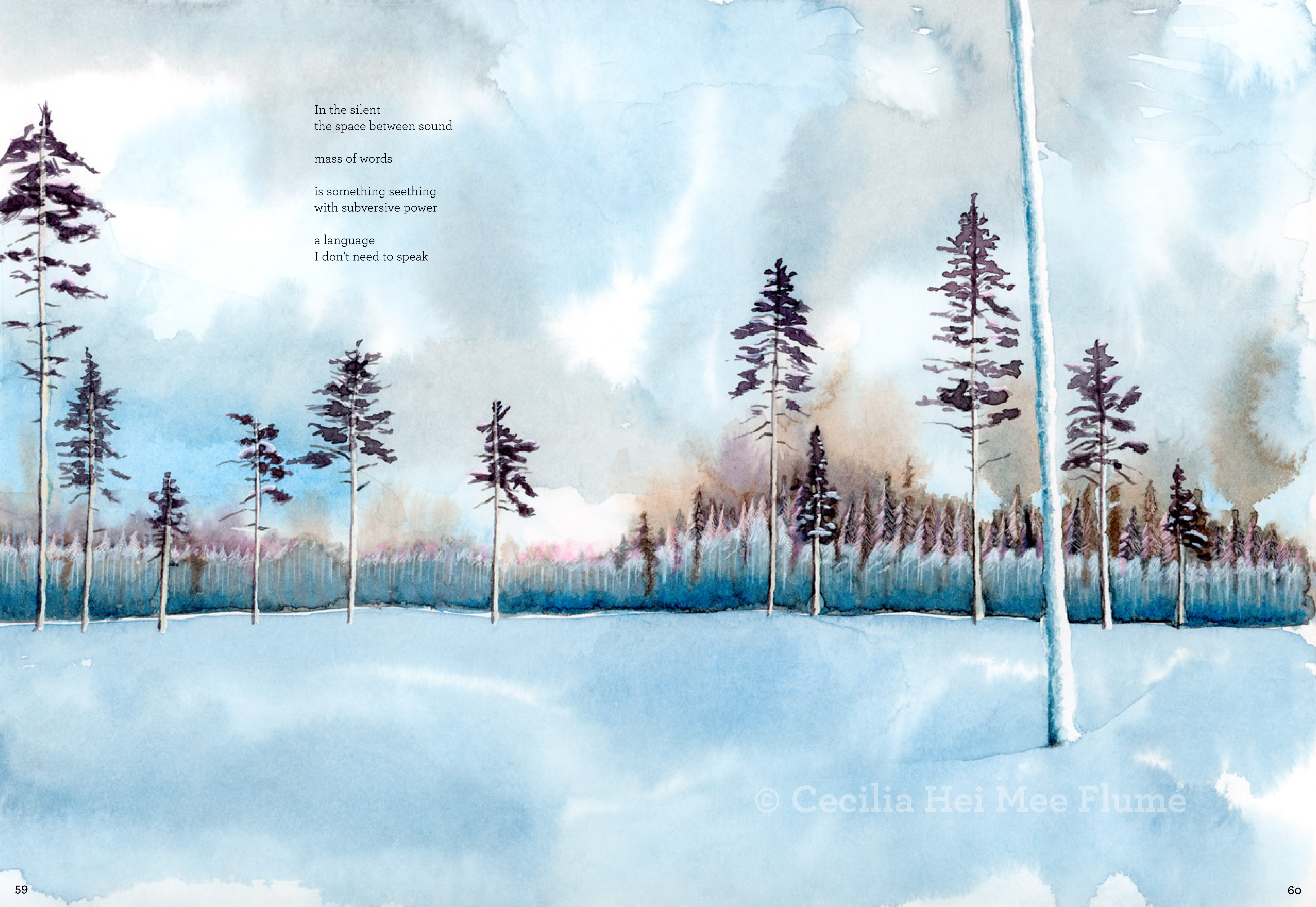
That people from the north
mirror their quiet landscape.

I didn't need their words to
understand that they did their best
with what they had been given.

They communicated their love
in other ways.

That which is not spoken
is also true.





In the silent
the space between sound

mass of words

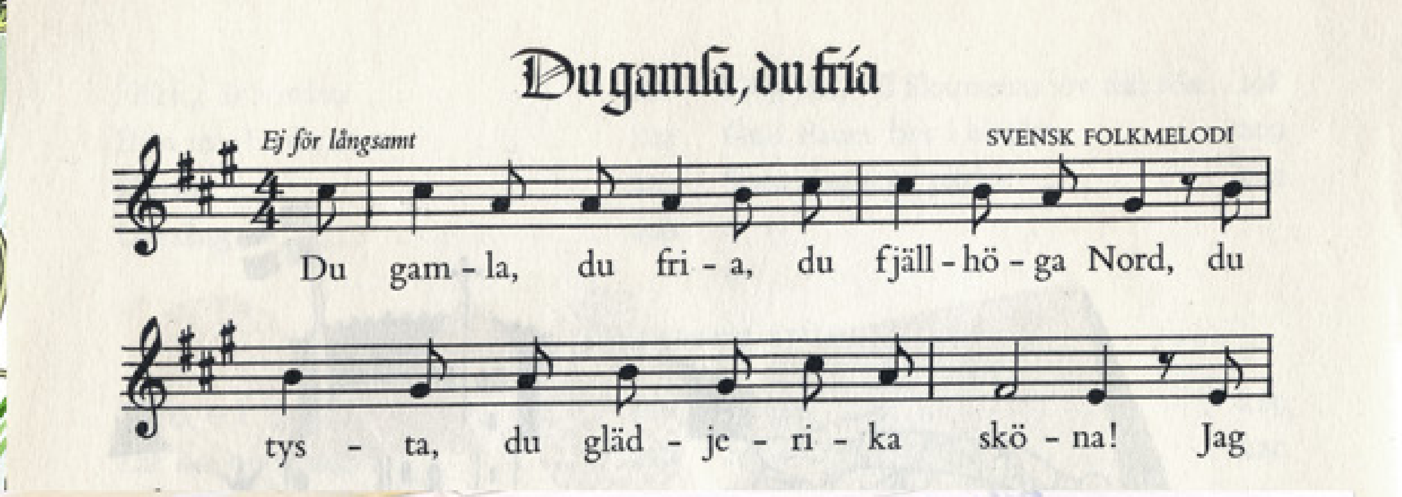
is something seething
with subversive power

a language
I don't need to speak

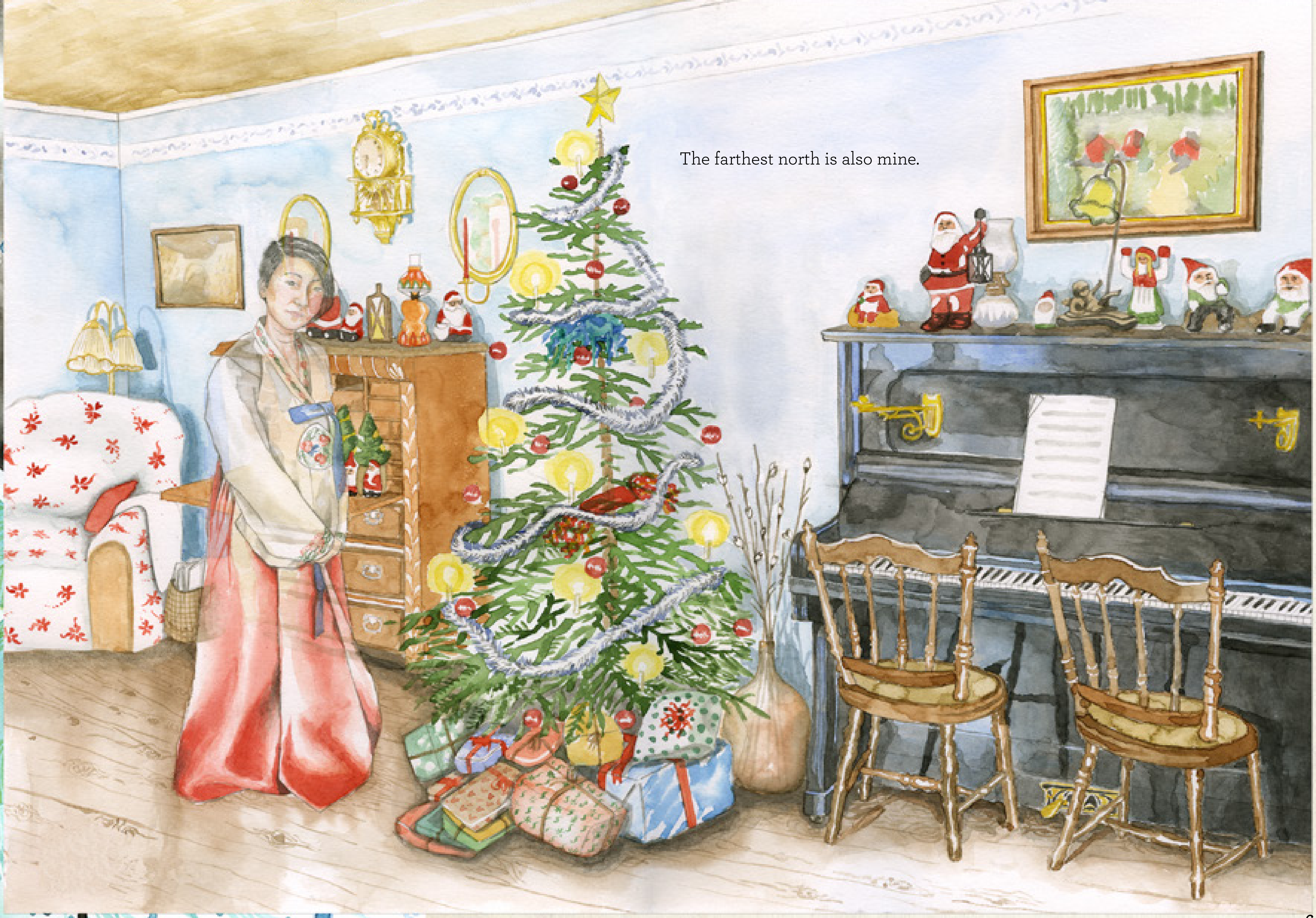
© Cecilia Hei Mee Flumé

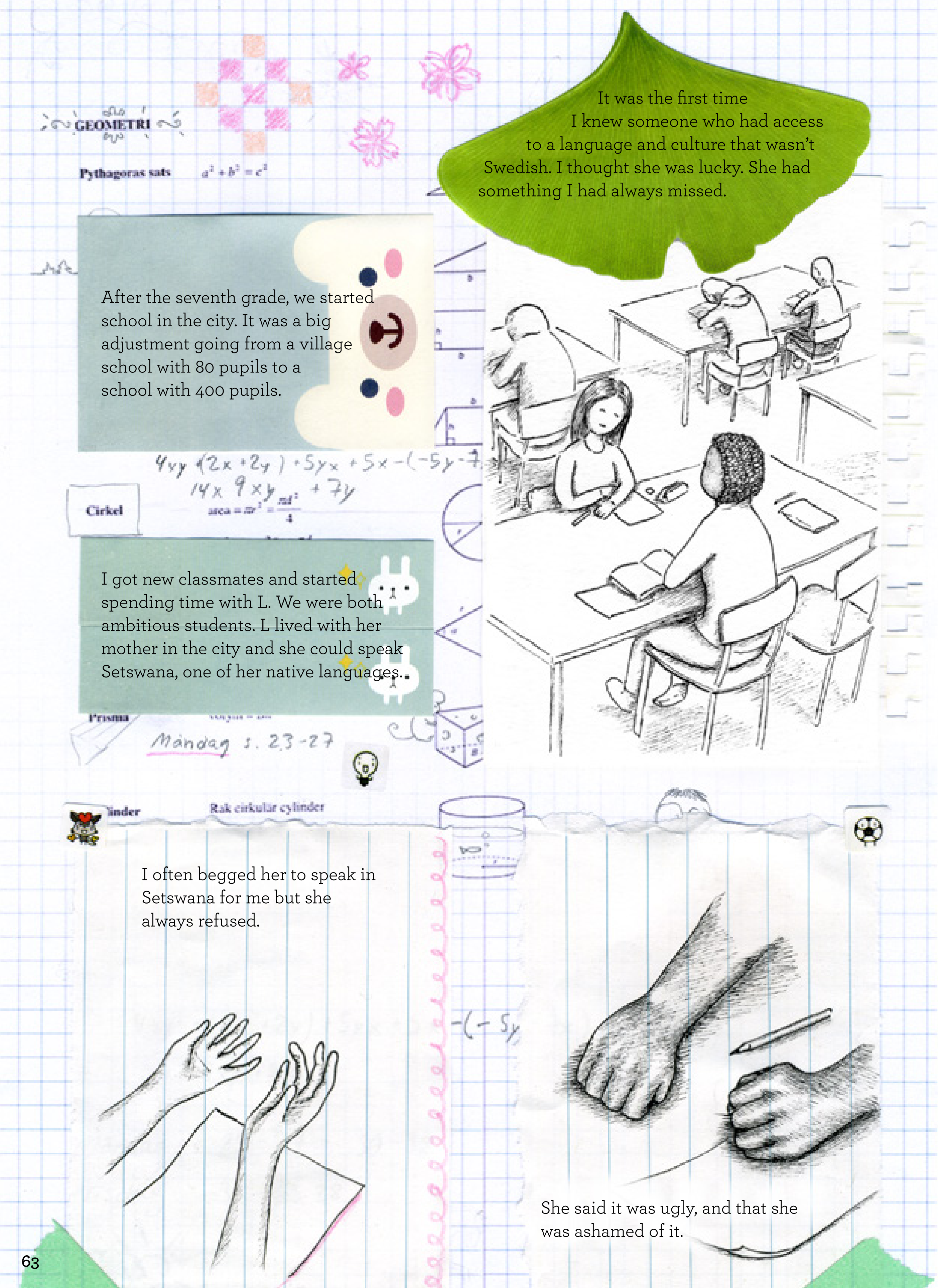
Can you measure Swedishness?
Is it if you can eat surströmming?
Grow potatoes? If you can sing
Den blomstertid nu kommer?
Have good grades in the Swedish
language? Bake flatbread in
a baking cabin?

If so, I am the epitome of Swedishness.


Du gamla, du fria
Ej för långsamt
SVENSK FOLKMELODI
Du gam - la, du fri - a, du fjäll - hö - ga Nord, du
tys - ta, du gläd - je - ri - ka skö - na! Jag

The farthest north is also mine.




GEOMETRI
Pythagoras sats a² + b² = c²
4xy (2x + 2y) + 5yx + 5x − (−5y − 7
14x 9xy + 7y
Cirkel
area = πr²
Prisma
Måndag s. 23-27
Rak cirkulär cylinder

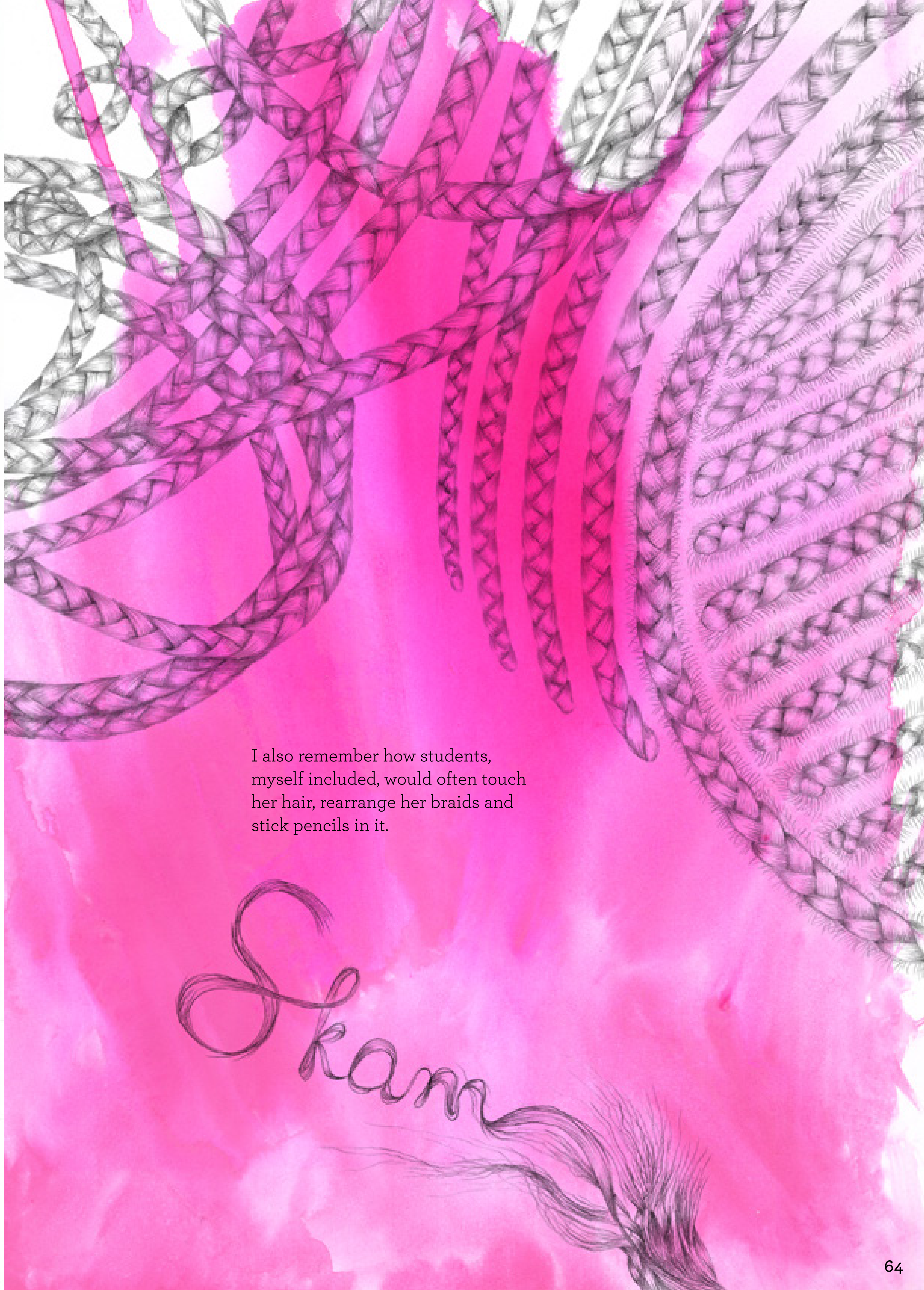
After the seventh grade, we started school in the city. It was a big adjustment going from a village school with 80 pupils to a school with 400 pupils.

I got new classmates and started spending time with L. We were both ambitious students. L lived with her mother in the city and she could speak Setswana, one of her native languages.

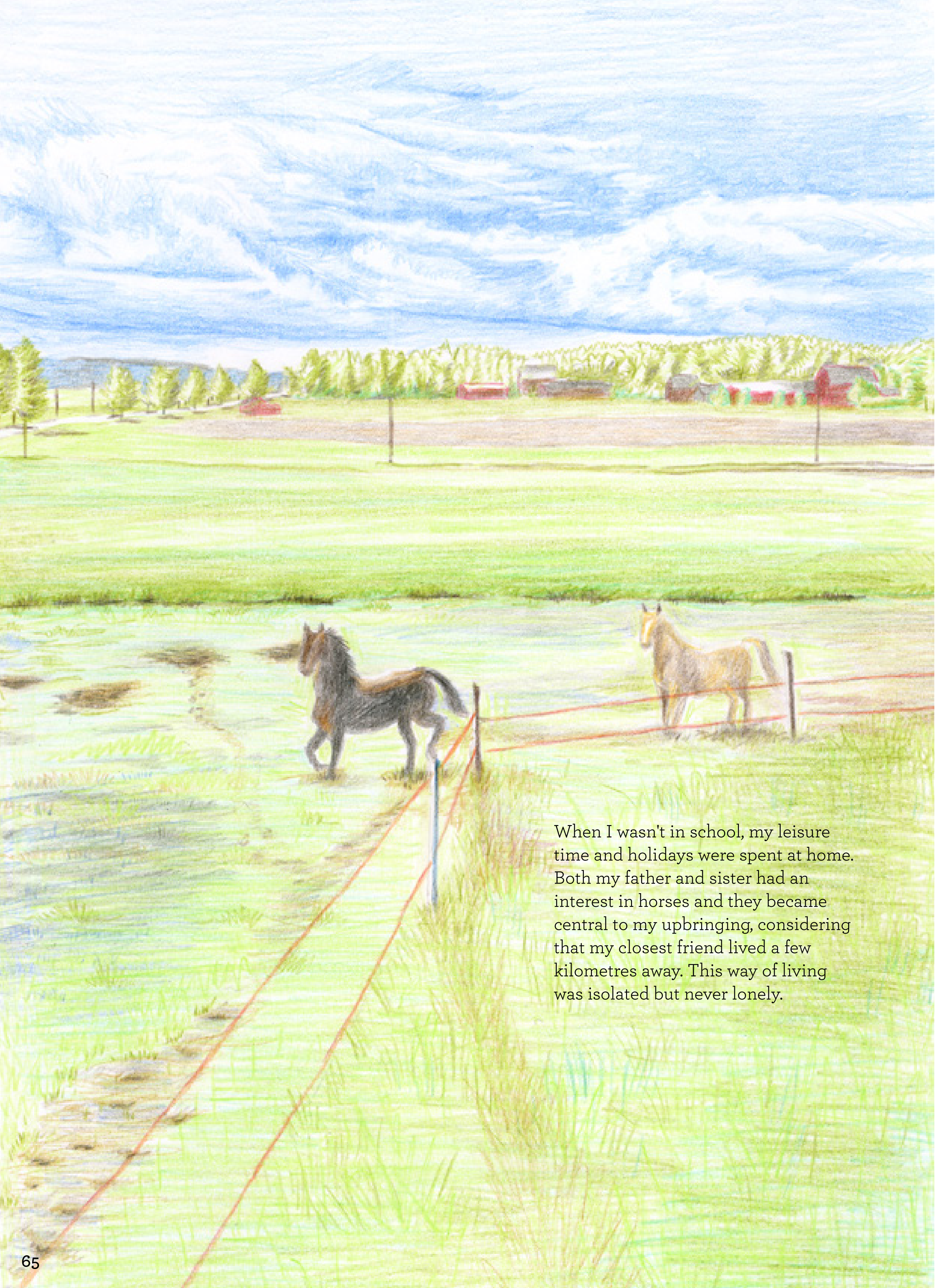
It was the first time I knew someone who had access to a language and culture that wasn't Swedish. I thought she was lucky. She had something I had always missed.

I often begged her to speak in Setswana for me but she always refused.

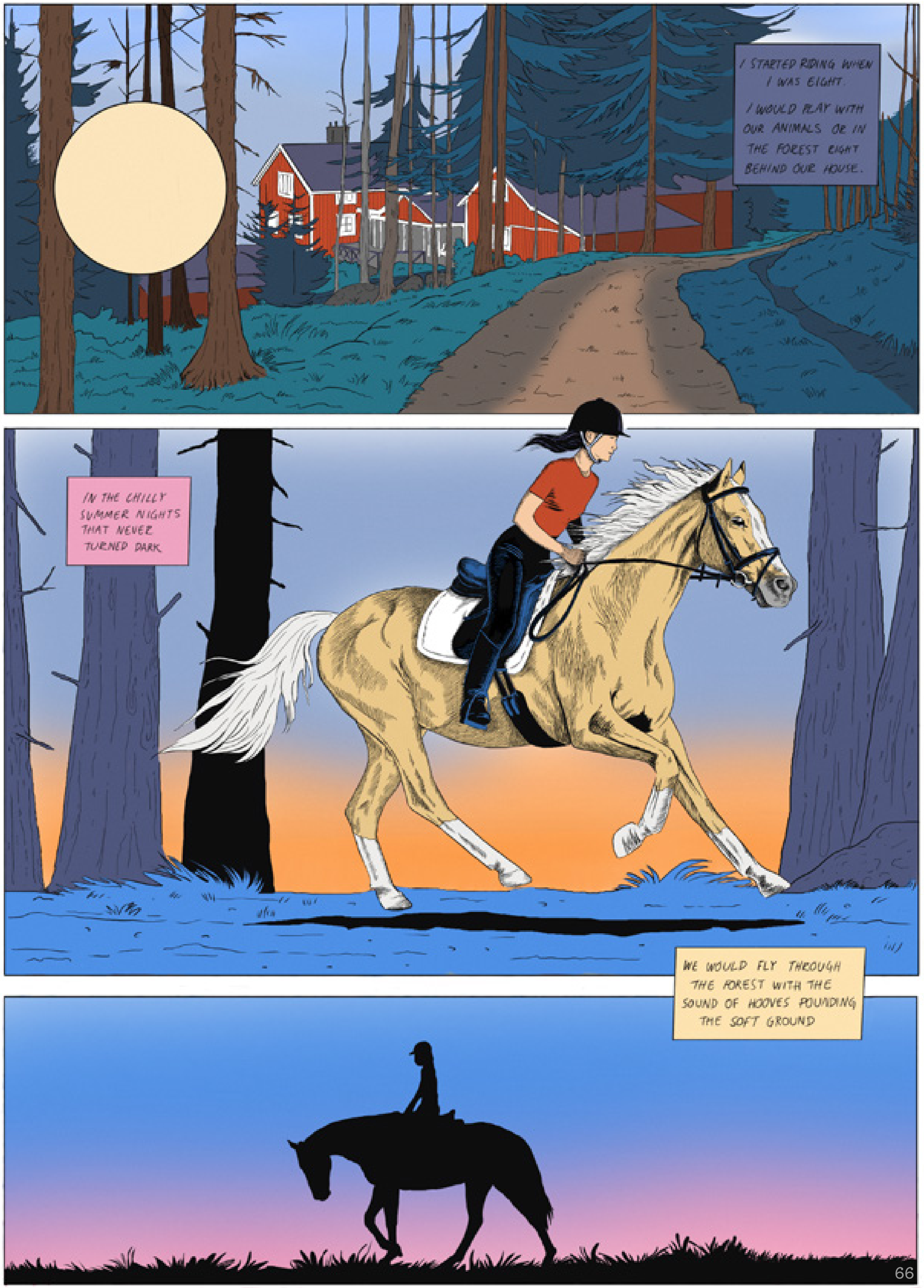
She said it was ugly, and that she was ashamed of it.

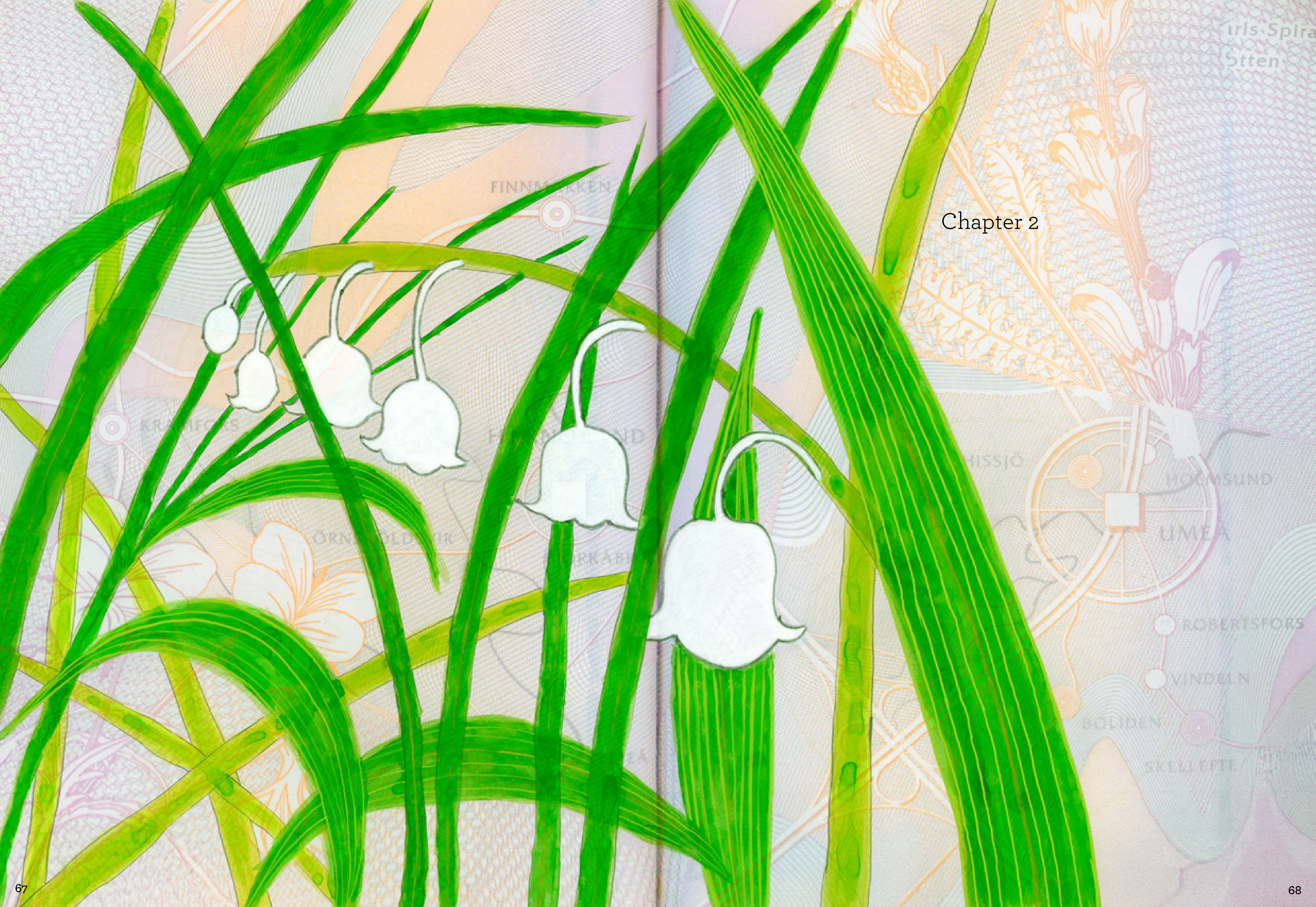


I also remember how students, myself included, would often touch her hair, rearrange her braids and stick pencils in it.



When I wasn't in school, my leisure time and holidays were spent at home. Both my father and sister had an interest in horses and they became central to my upbringing, considering that my closest friend lived a few kilometres away. This way of living was isolated but never lonely.

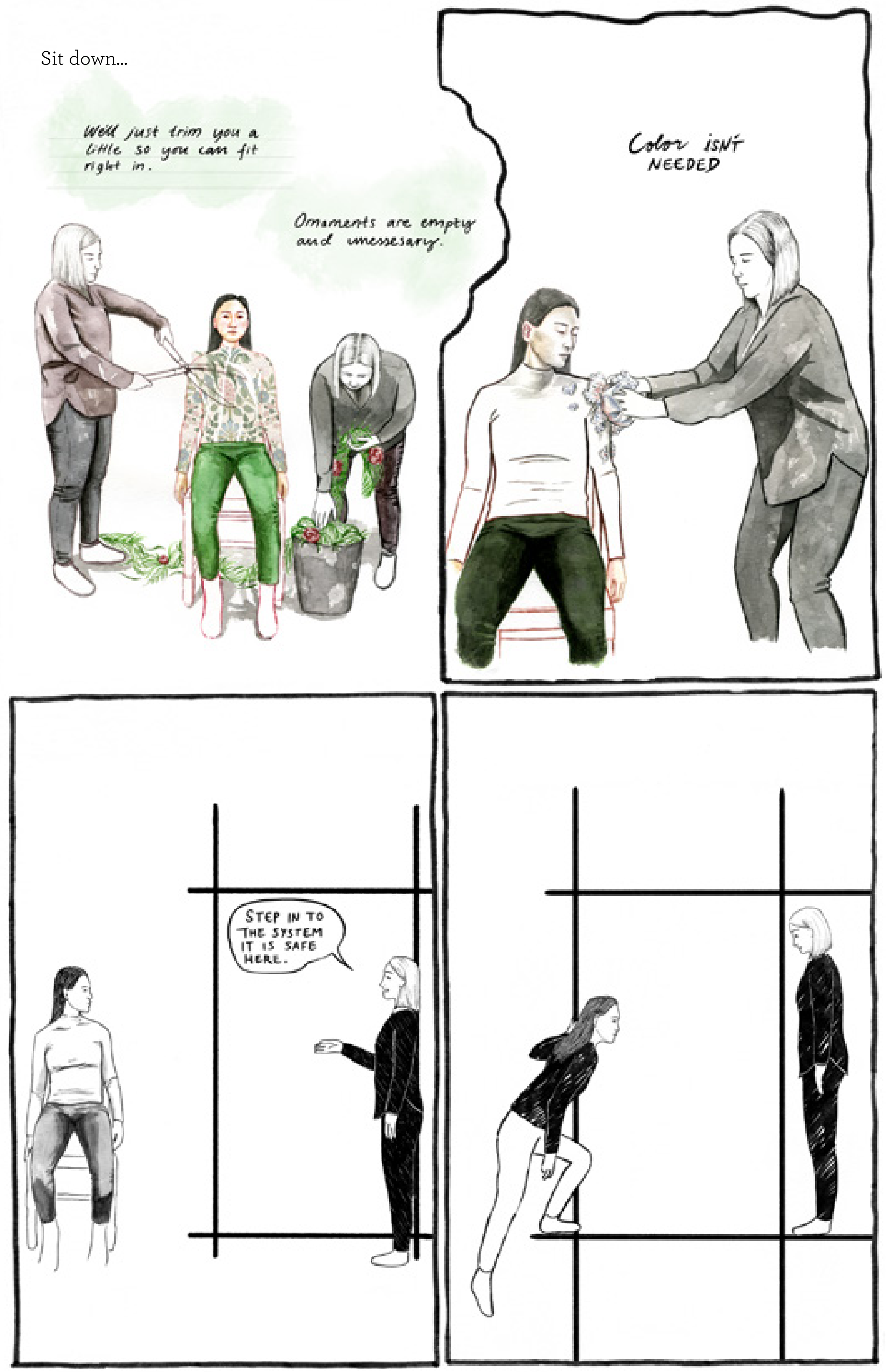

I STARTED RIDING WHEN I WAS EIGHT.
I WOULD PLAY WITH OUR ANIMALS OR IN THE FOREST RIGHT BEHIND OUR HOUSE.
IN THE CHILLY SUMMER NIGHTS THAT NEVER TURNED DARK
WE WOULD FLY THROUGH THE FOREST WITH THE SOUND OF HOOVES POUNDING THE SOFT GROUND

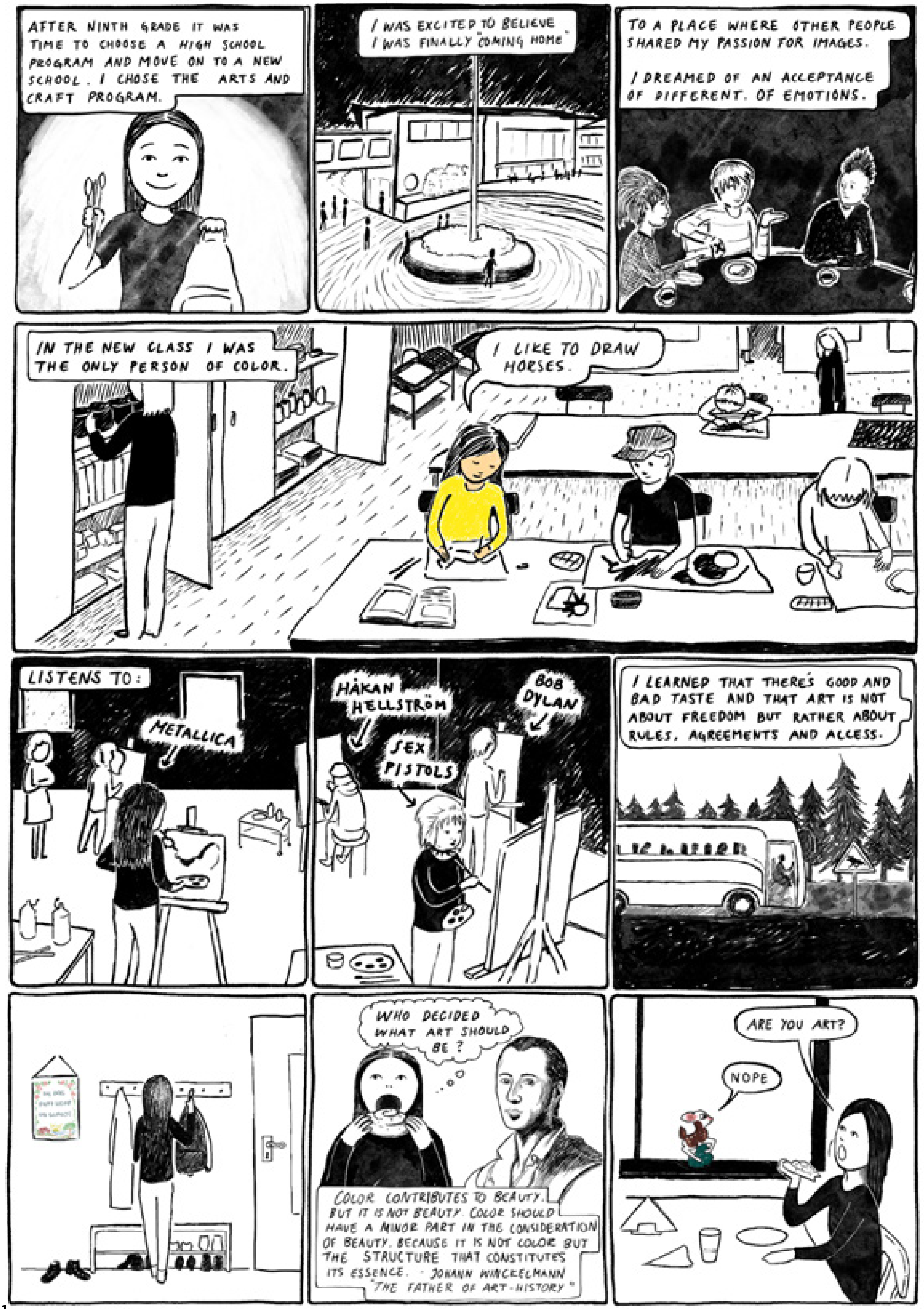

HISSJÖ
HOLMSUND
UMEÅ
ROBERTSFORS
VINDELN
BOLIDEN
SKELLEFTE

Chapter 2

Take my hand
Take my whole life, too
For I can't help falling in love
with you

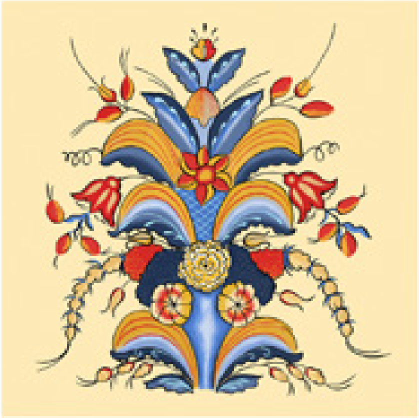
Sit down...

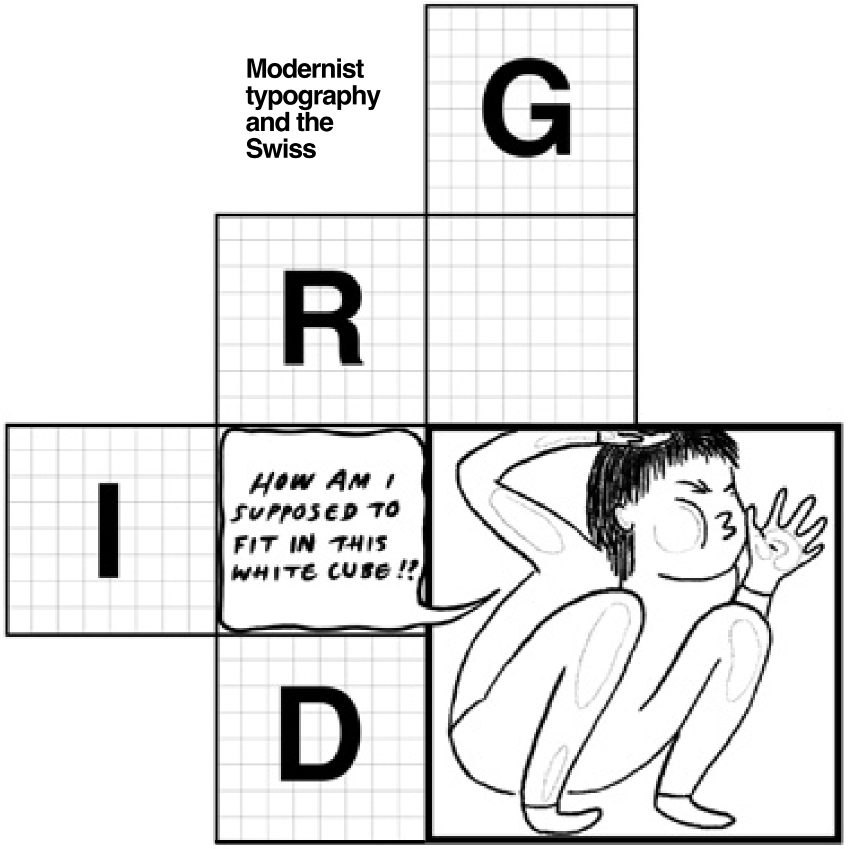

We'll just trim you a little so you can fit right in.
Ornaments are empty and unnessesary.
Color isn't NEEDED
STEP IN TO THE SYSTEM IT IS SAFE HERE.

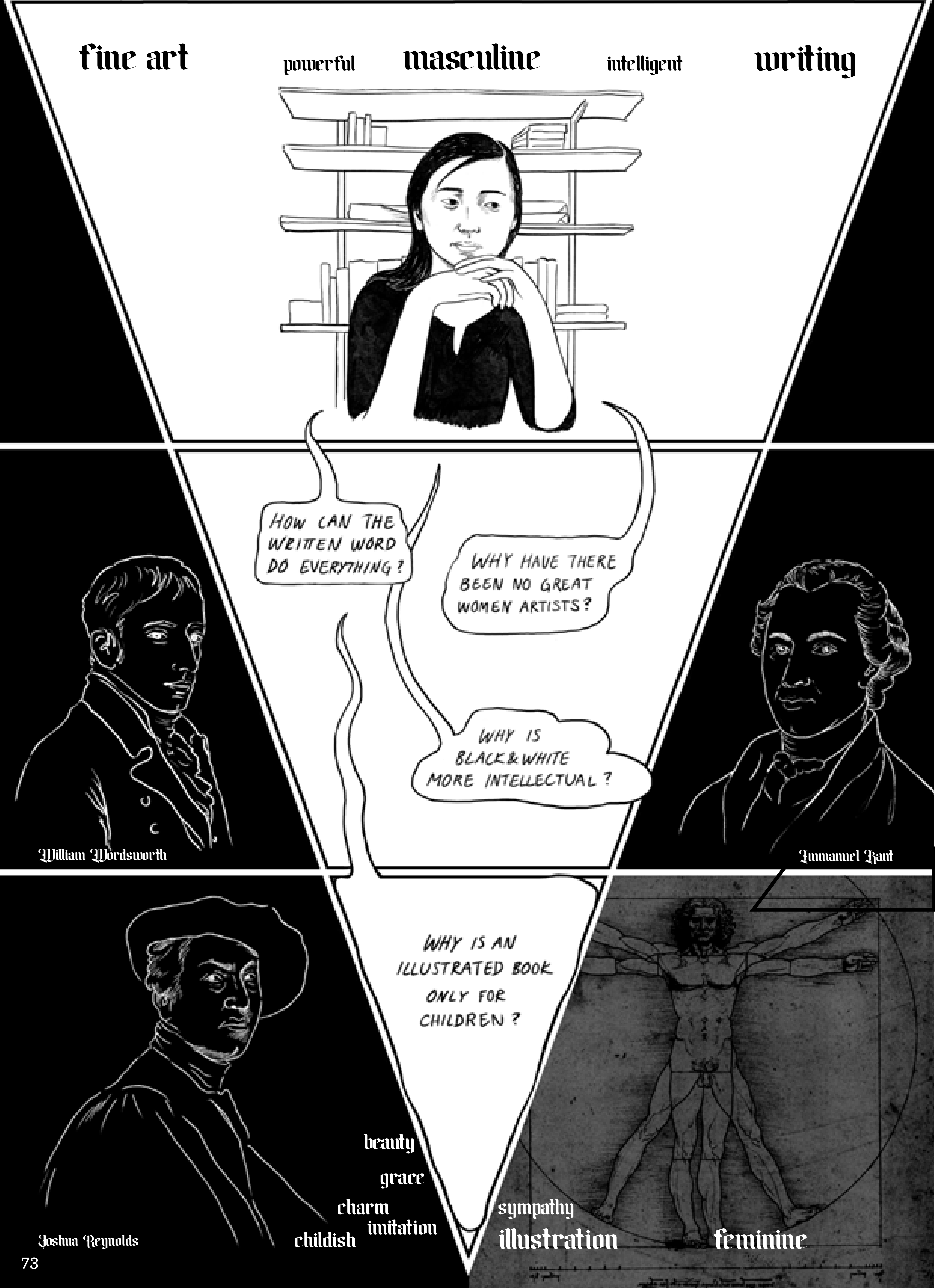

AFTER NINTH GRADE IT WAS TIME TO CHOOSE A HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM AND MOVE ON TO A NEW SCHOOL. I CHOSE THE ARTS AND CRAFT PROGRAM.
I WAS EXCITED TO BELIEVE I WAS FINALLY "COMING HOME"
TO A PLACE WHERE OTHER PEOPLE SHARED MY PASSION FOR IMAGES.
I DREAMED OF AN ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENT. OF EMOTIONS.
IN THE NEW CLASS I WAS THE ONLY PERSON OF COLOR.
I LIKE TO DRAW HORSES.
LISTENS TO:
METALLICA
HÅKAN HELLSTRÖM
SEX PISTOLS
BOB DYLAN
I LEARNED THAT THERE'S GOOD AND BAD TASTE AND THAT ART IS NOT ABOUT FREEDOM BUT RATHER ABOUT RULES, AGREEMENTS AND ACCESS.
WHO DECIDED WHAT ART SHOULD BE?
COLOR CONTRIBUTES TO BEAUTY. BUT IT IS NOT BEAUTY. COLOR SHOULD HAVE A MINOR PART IN THE CONSIDERATION OF BEAUTY, BECAUSE IT IS NOT COLOR BUT THE STRUCTURE THAT CONSTITUTES ITS ESSENCE. - JOHANN WINCKELMANN "THE FATHER OF ART-HISTORY"
ARE YOU ART?
NOPE

It was quickly pointed out to me what was poor taste.

My images they were




Modernist typography and the Swiss
G
R
I
D
HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO FIT IN THIS WHITE CUBE !?


fine art
powerful
masculine
intelligent
writing
HOW CAN THE WRITTEN WORD DO EVERYTHING?
WHY HAVE THERE BEEN NO GREAT WOMEN ARTISTS?
WHY IS BLACK & WHITE MORE INTELLECTUAL?
William Wordsworth
Immanuel Kant
WHY IS AN ILLUSTRATED BOOK ONLY FOR CHILDREN?
Joshua Reynolds
beauty
grace
charm
imitation
childish
sympathy
illustration
feminine

My closest friends in class had different backgrounds to me.

They all lived in the city.

Their parents were artists, musicians, academics, educated.

They grew up with art.

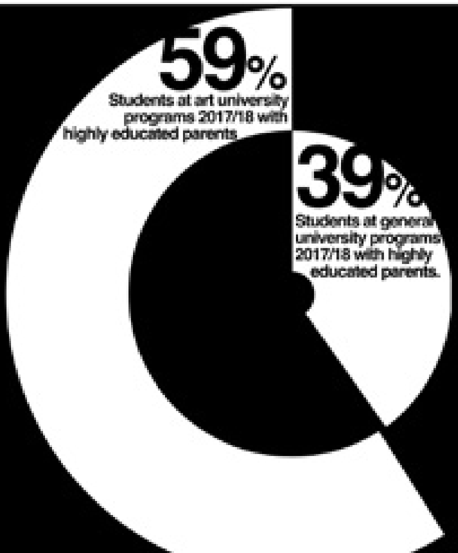
They already knew the

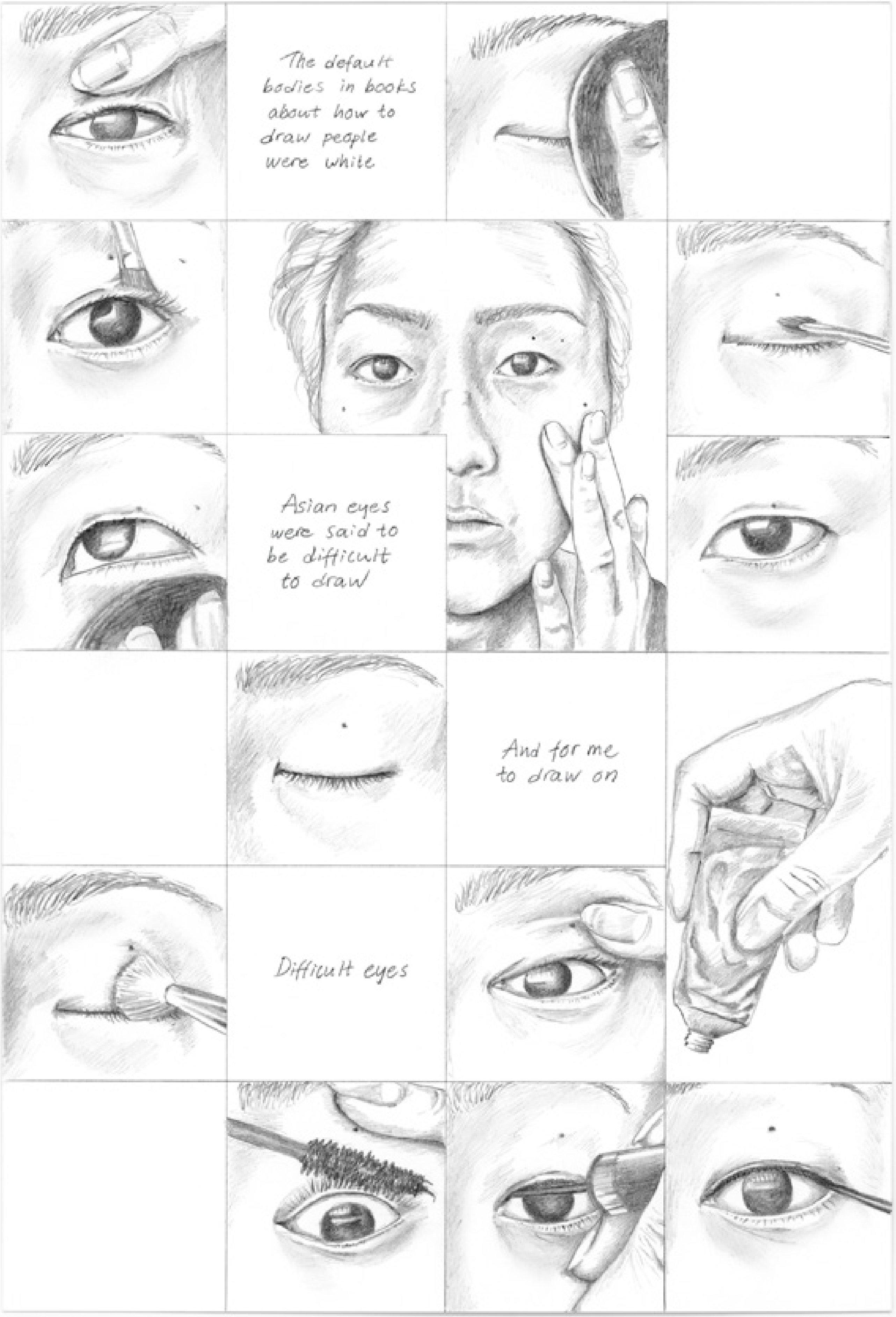
rules

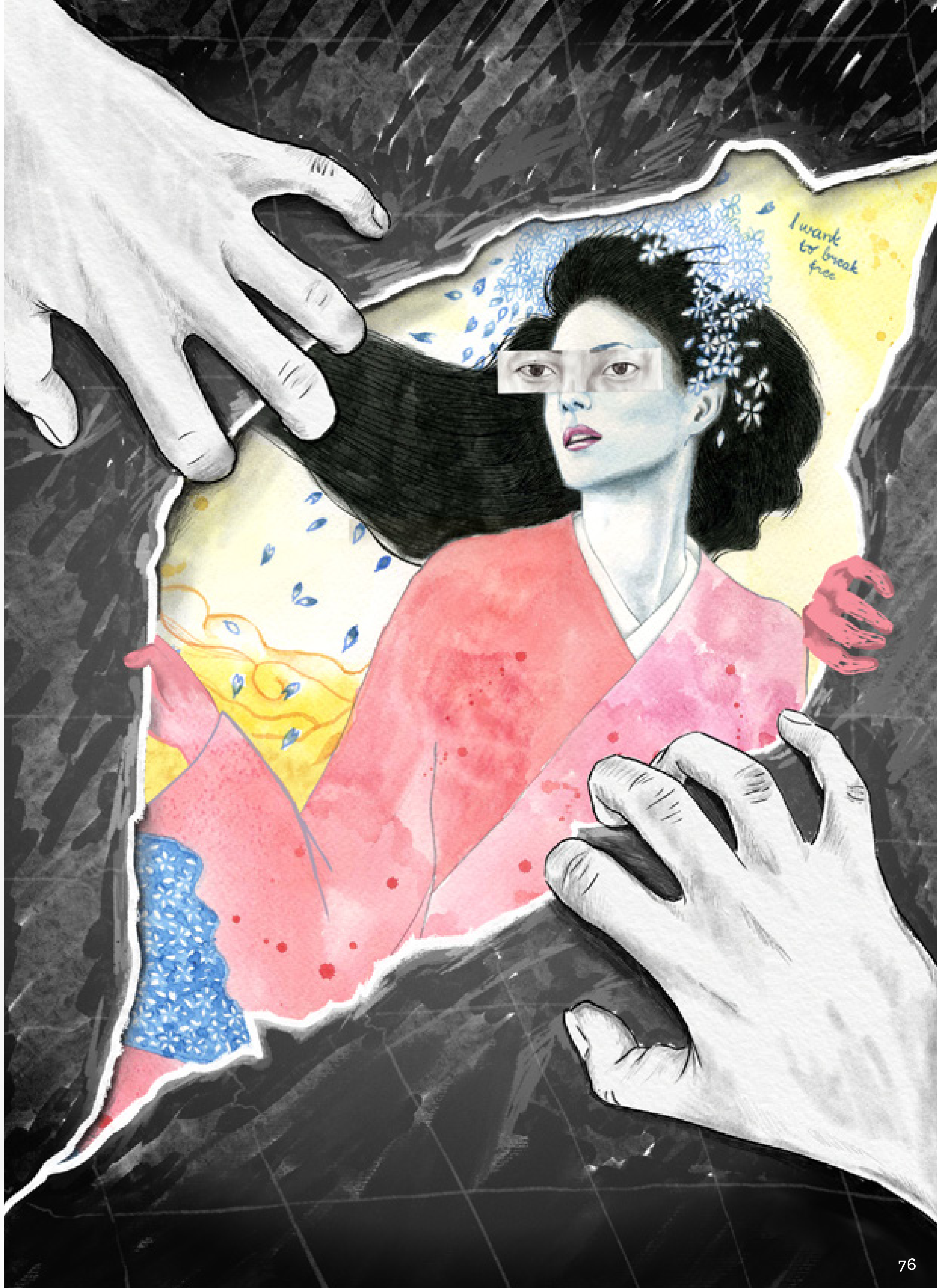
I did my best to learn them and adapt to some.

I stopped drawing horses and instead drew portraits of Asians.

Though they were probably made stereotypical, orientalised, and romanticised, it became a way for me to balance the lack of representation in the images I saw around me.

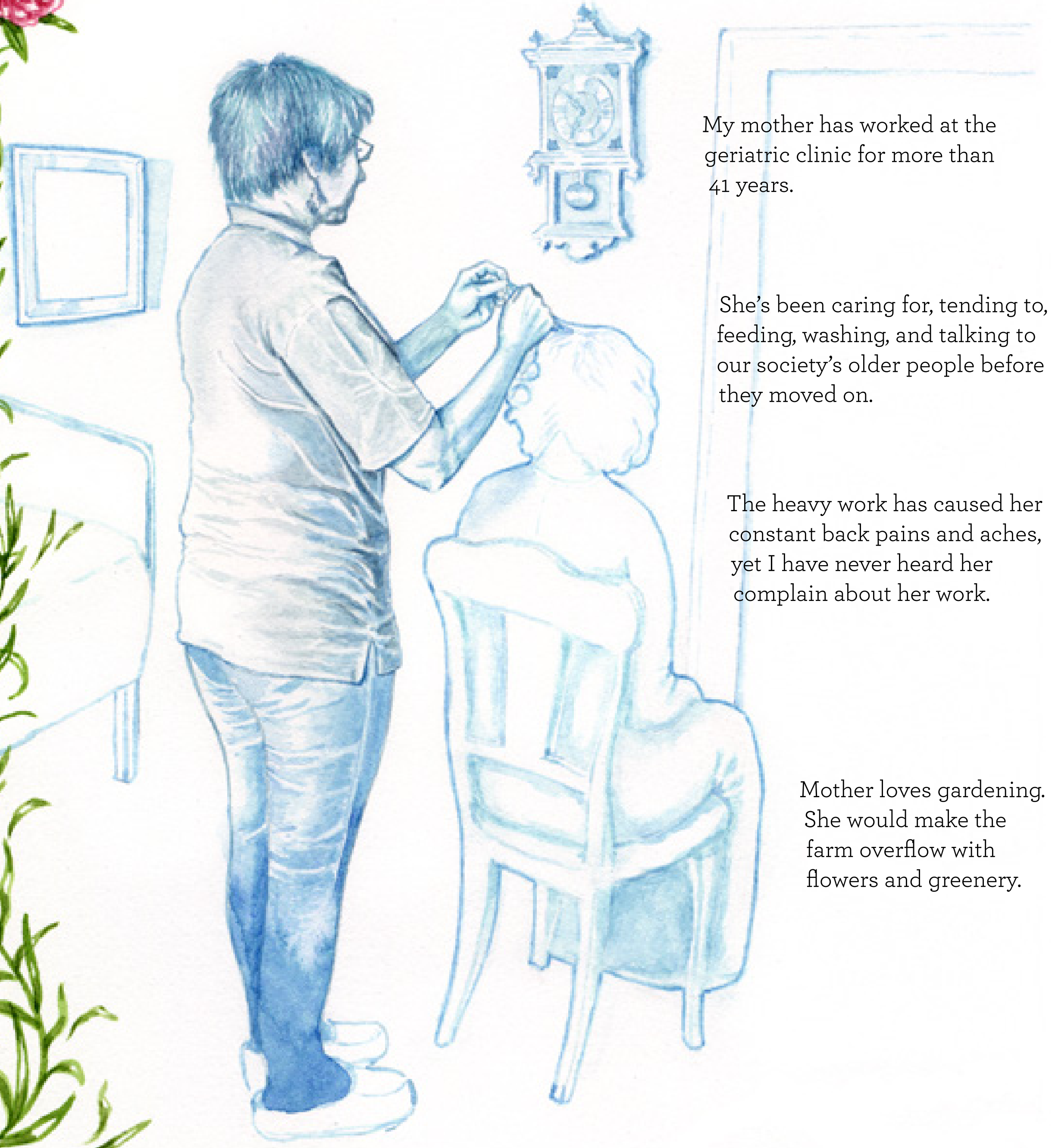



The default bodies in books about how to draw people were white
Asian eyes were said to be difficult to draw
And for me to draw on
Difficult eyes


I want to break free

My parents are not educated, nor intellectuals. They never helped me with my homework or my essays.

But they are the most kind, honest and hard-working people I know.



My mother has worked at the geriatric clinic for more than 41 years.

She's been caring for, tending to, feeding, washing, and talking to our society's older people before they moved on.

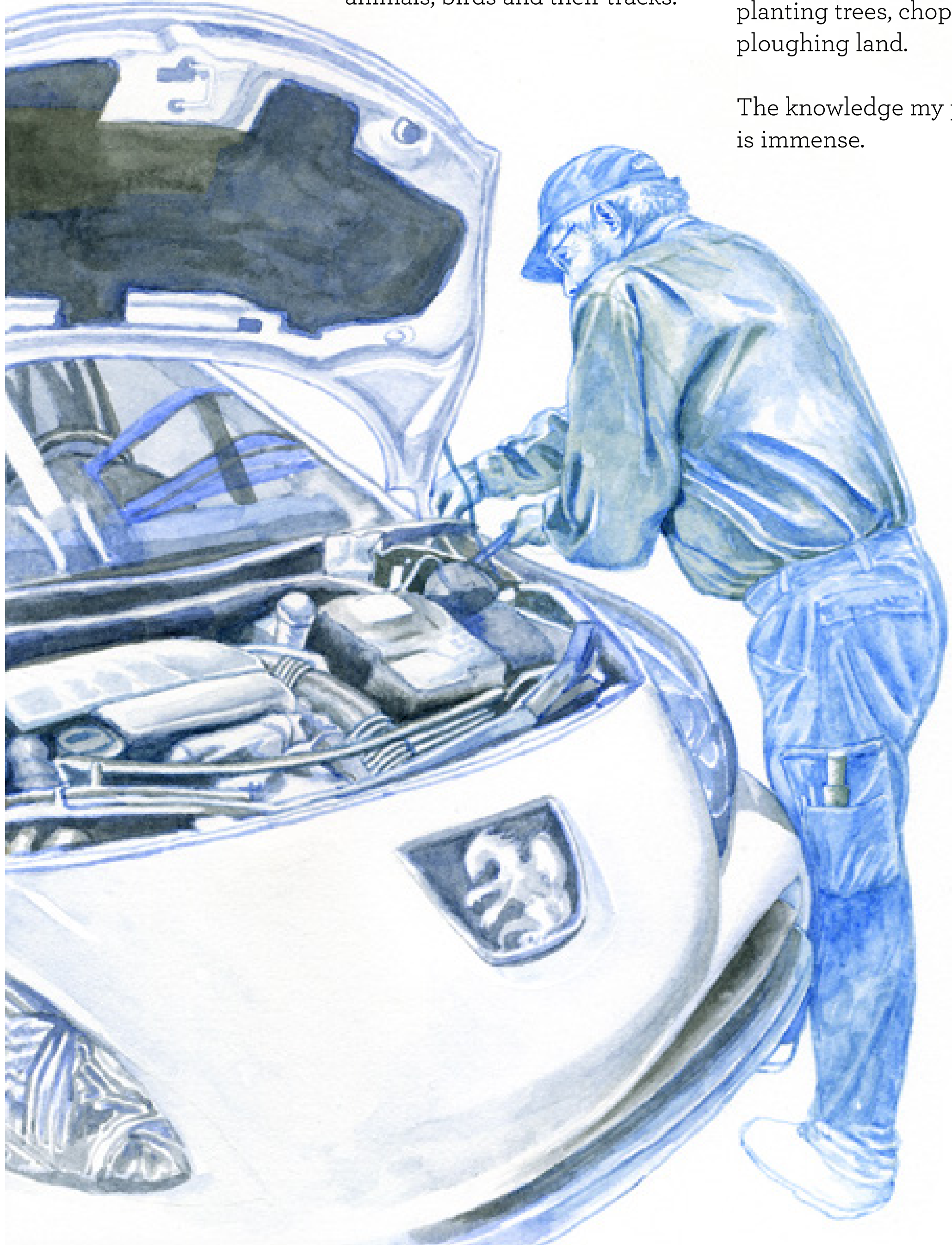
The heavy work has caused her constant back pains and aches, yet I have never heard her complain about her work.

Mother loves gardening. She would make the farm overflow with flowers and greenery.

My father has been working as a car mechanic for more than 45 years.

I don't think there's anything he can't build or fix.

He loves and cares for nature. My best memories with him when growing up were when we walked in the forest and he told me about all the animals, birds and their tracks.



Even in their free time they would always be outside tinkering, working at the farm, in the garden. Fixing fences, feeding horses, planting trees, chopping wood, ploughing land.

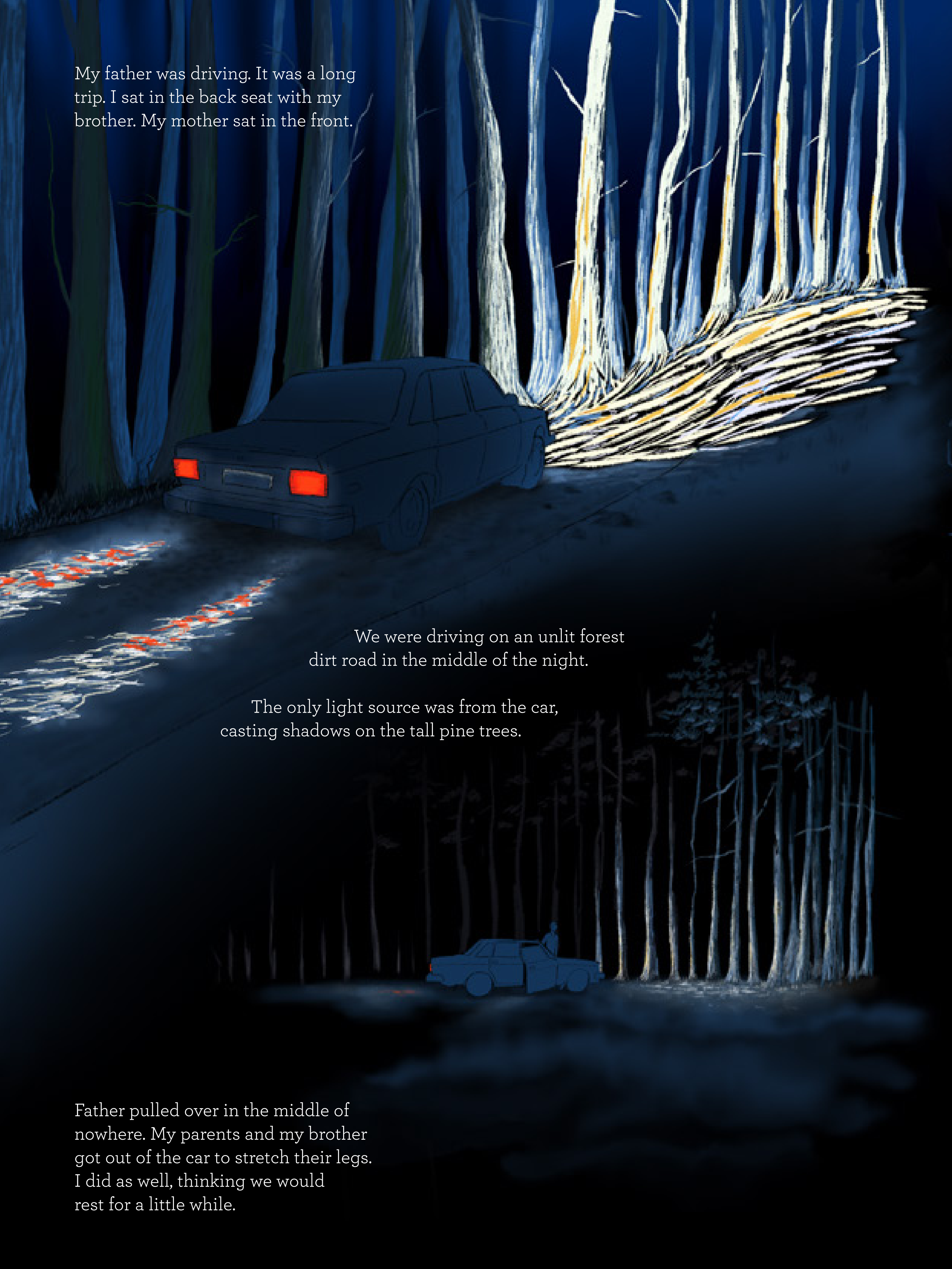
The knowledge my parents have is immense.

I often wondered if the the things
I didn’t share with my parents came
from elsewhere. The unruly feeling of
not knowing. Like I didn’t make sense.

This unknown side of my identity and
history was a black hole. One I could fill
with every fantasy and fear.

I needed to know.

Sometimes I had recurring nightmares.

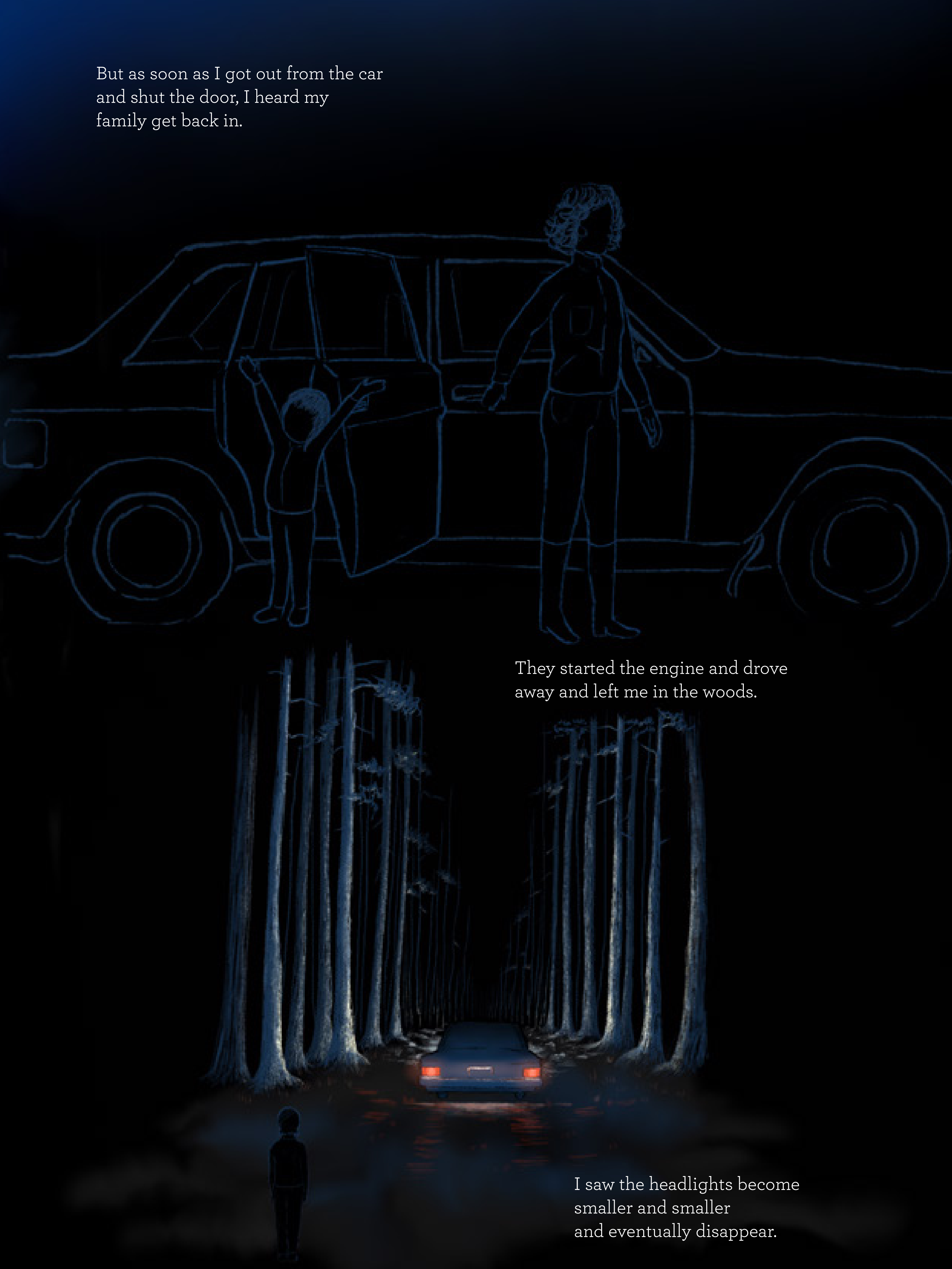


My father was driving. It was a long trip. I sat in the back seat with my brother. My mother sat in the front.

We were driving on an unlit forest dirt road in the middle of the night.

The only light source was from the car, casting shadows on the tall pine trees.

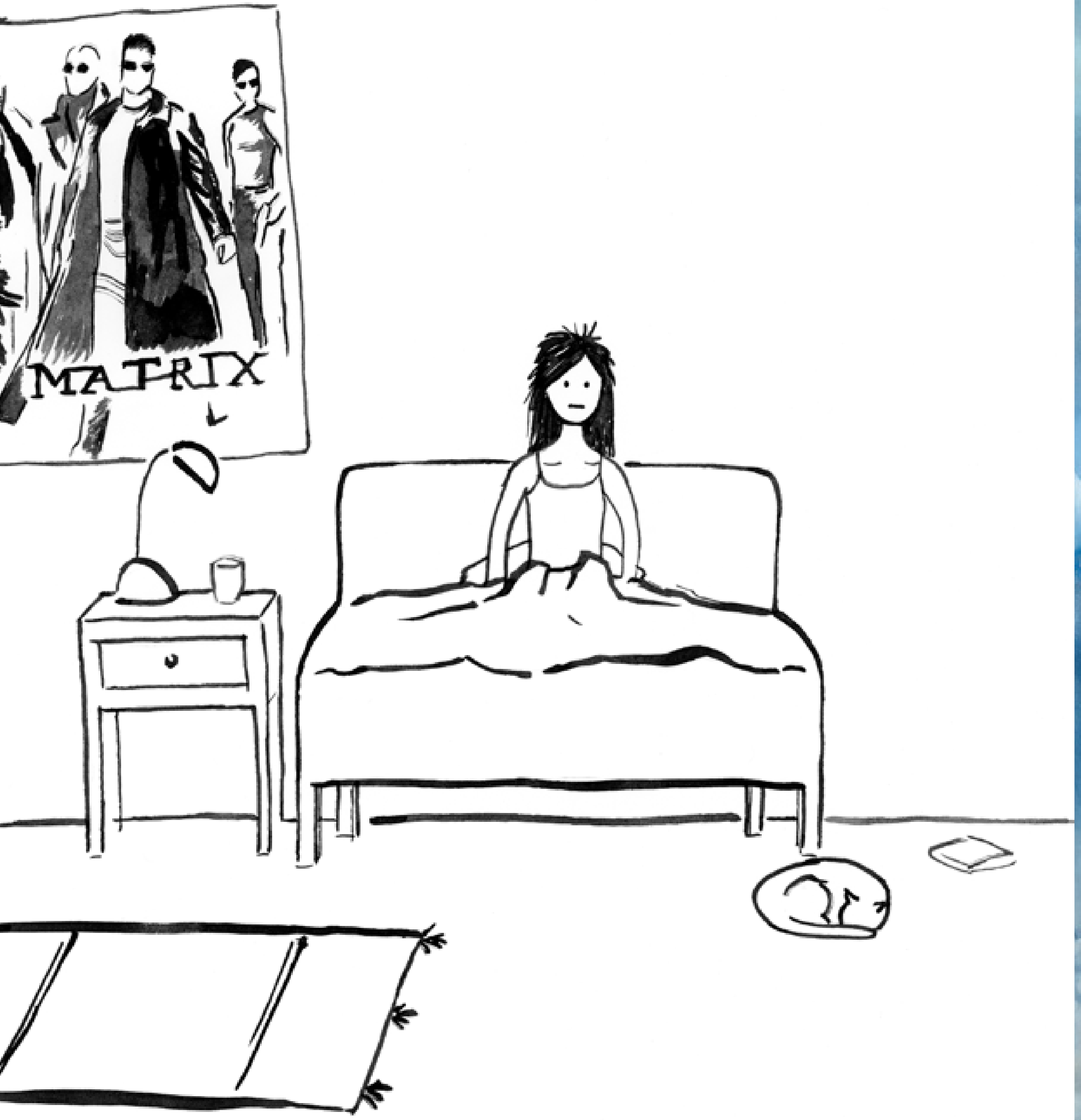
Father pulled over in the middle of nowhere. My parents and my brother got out of the car to stretch their legs. I did as well, thinking we would rest for a little while.

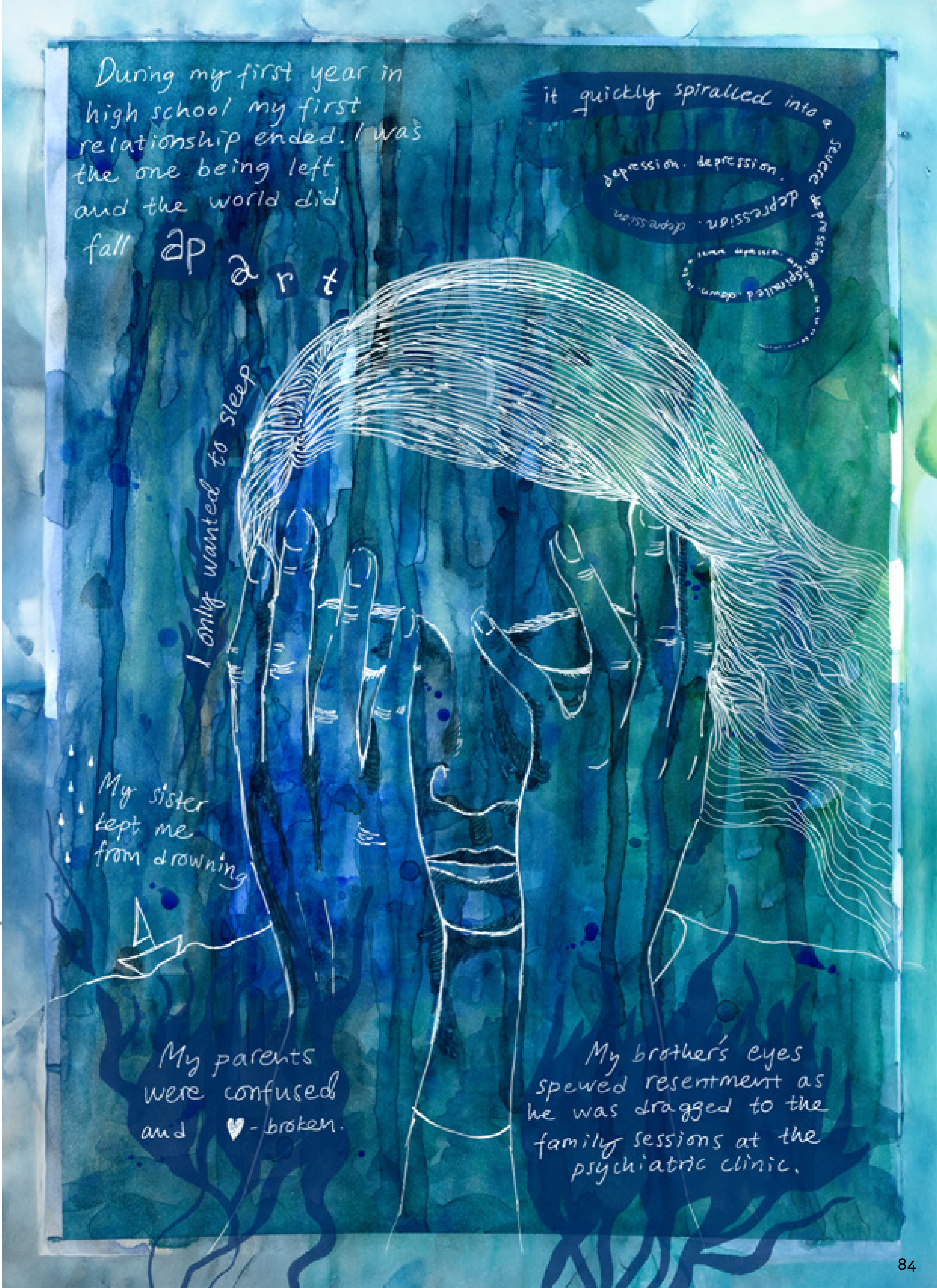


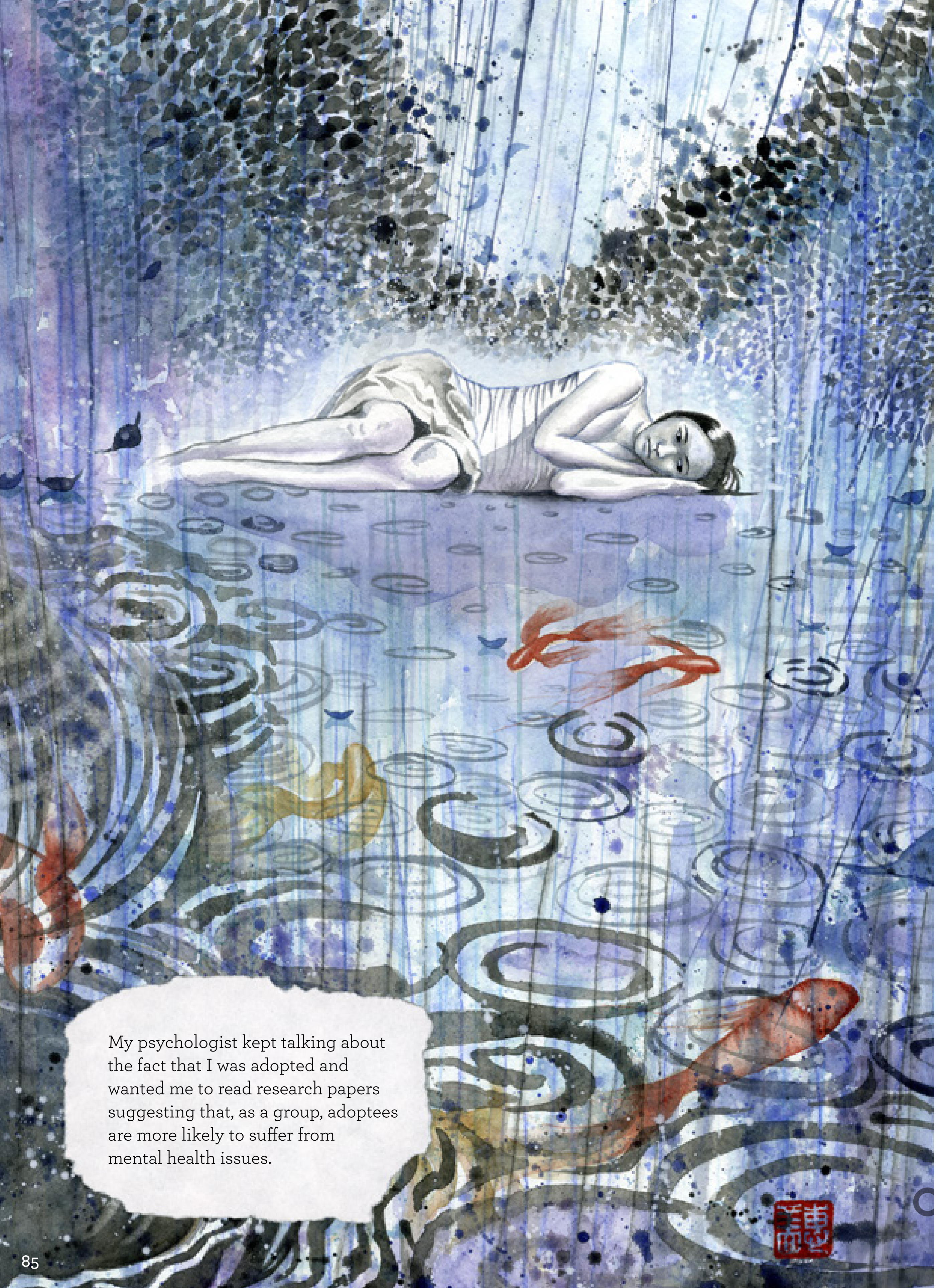
But as soon as I got out from the car and shut the door, I heard my family get back in.

They started the engine and drove away and left me in the woods.

I saw the headlights become smaller and smaller and eventually disappear.

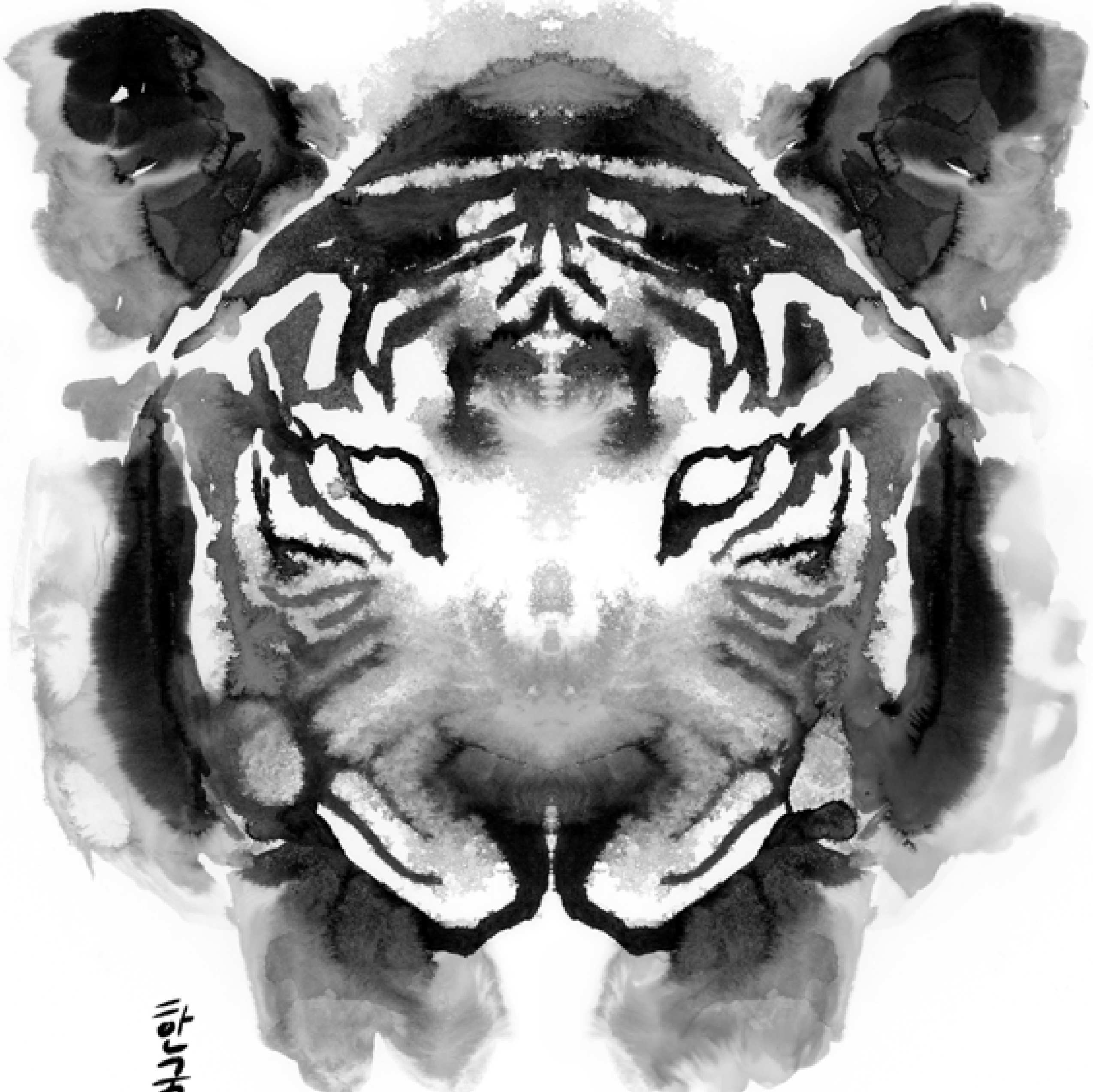

MATRIX


During my first year in high school my first relationship ended. I was the one being left and the world did fall ap a r t
it quickly spiralled into a severe depression. depression. depression. depression. depression. depression. spiralled down. into a severe depression.
I only wanted to sleep
My sister kept me from drowning
My parents were confused and ♥-broken.
My brother's eyes spewed resentment as he was dragged to the family sessions at the psychiatric clinic.



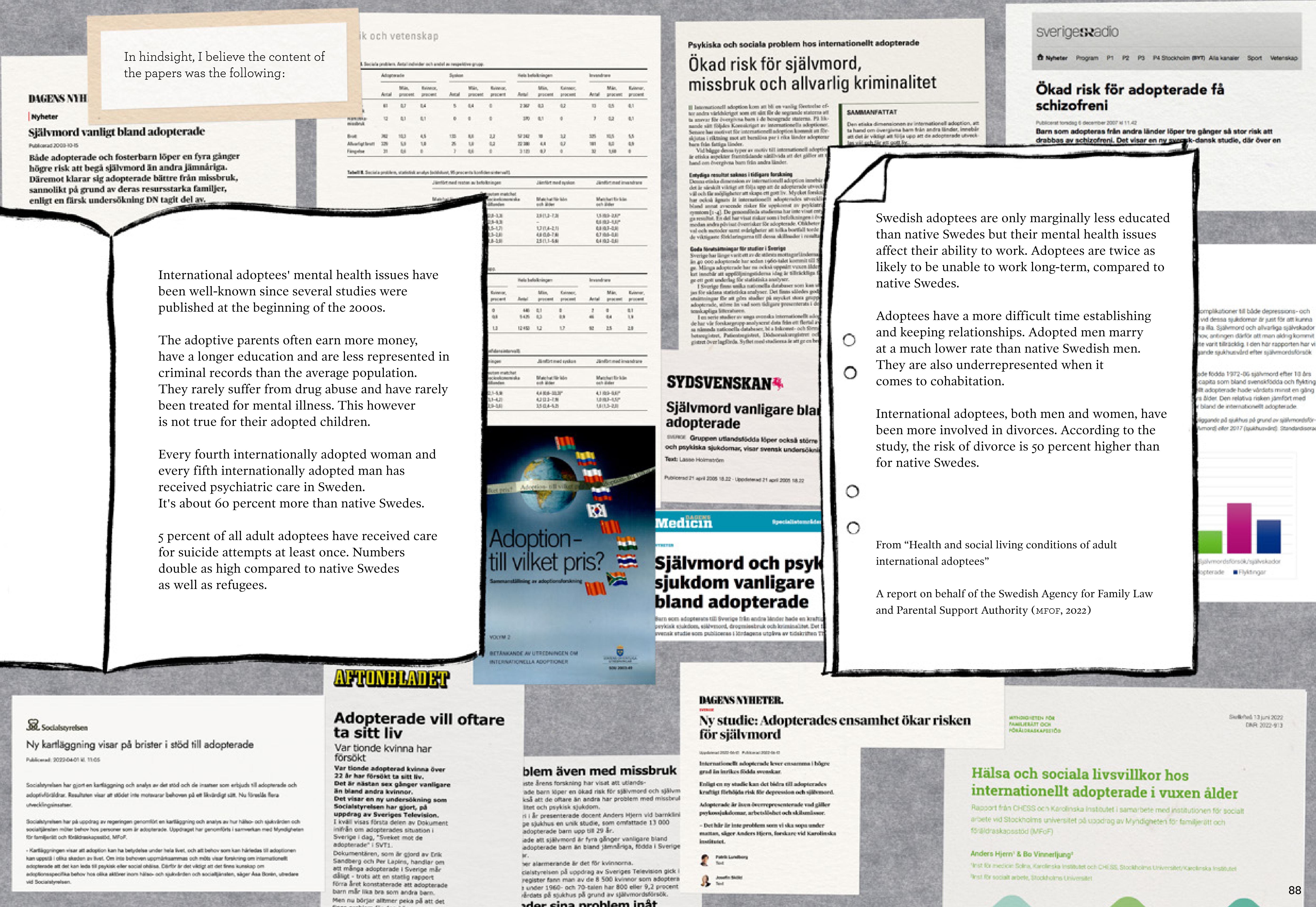
My psychologist kept talking about the fact that I was adopted and wanted me to read research papers suggesting that, as a group, adoptees are more likely to suffer from mental health issues.

She made me frustrated and angry, thinking it had **nothing** to do with my depression.



I was just like everyone else?

I took the papers home, but never even touched them.



In hindsight, I believe the content of the papers was the following:

International adoptees' mental health issues have been well-known since several studies were published at the beginning of the 2000s.

The adoptive parents often earn more money, have a longer education and are less represented in criminal records than the average population. They rarely suffer from drug abuse and have rarely been treated for mental illness. This however is not true for their adopted children.

Every fourth internationally adopted woman and every fifth internationally adopted man has received psychiatric care in Sweden.
It's about 60 percent more than native Swedes.

5 percent of all adult adoptees have received care for suicide attempts at least once. Numbers double as high compared to native Swedes as well as refugees.

Swedish adoptees are only marginally less educated than native Swedes but their mental health issues affect their ability to work. Adoptees are twice as likely to be unable to work long-term, compared to native Swedes.

Adoptees have a more difficult time establishing and keeping relationships. Adopted men marry at a much lower rate than native Swedish men. They are also underrepresented when it comes to cohabitation.

International adoptees, both men and women, have been more involved in divorces. According to the study, the risk of divorce is 50 percent higher than for native Swedes.

From "Health and social living conditions of adult international adoptees"

A report on behalf of the Swedish Agency for Family Law and Parental Support Authority (MFOF, 2022)

DAGENS NYH

Nyheter

Självmord vanligt bland adopterade

Publicerad 2003-10-15

Både adopterade och fosterbarn löper en fyra gånger högre risk att begå självmord än andra jämnåriga. Däremot klarar sig adopterade bättre från missbruk, sannolikt på grund av deras resursstarka familjer, enligt en färsk undersökning DN tagit del av.

Psykiska och sociala problem hos internationellt adopterade

Ökad risk för självmord, missbruk och allvarlig kriminalitet

SAMMANFATTAT

---

sverigesradio

Ökad risk för adopterade få schizofreni

Publicerat torsdag 6 december 2007 kl 11.42

Barn som adopteras från andra länder löper tre gånger så stor risk att drabbas av schizofreni. Det visar en ny svensk-dansk studie, där över en

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SYDSVENSKAN

Självmord vanligare blar
adopterade

Publicerad 21 april 2005 18.22 · Uppdaterad 21 april 2005 18.22

Medicin

Självmord och psyk
sjukdom vanligare
bland adopterade

Adoption – till vilket pris?

Sammanställning av adoptionsforskning

VOLYM 2

BETÄNKANDE AV UTREDNINGEN OM INTERNATIONELLA ADOPTIONER

SOU 2003:49

AFTONBLADET

Adopterade vill oftare ta sitt liv

Var tionde kvinna har försökt

Socialstyrelsen

Ny kartläggning visar på brister i stöd till adopterade

Publicerad: 2022-04-01 kl. 11:05

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blem även med missbruk

DAGENS NYHETER.

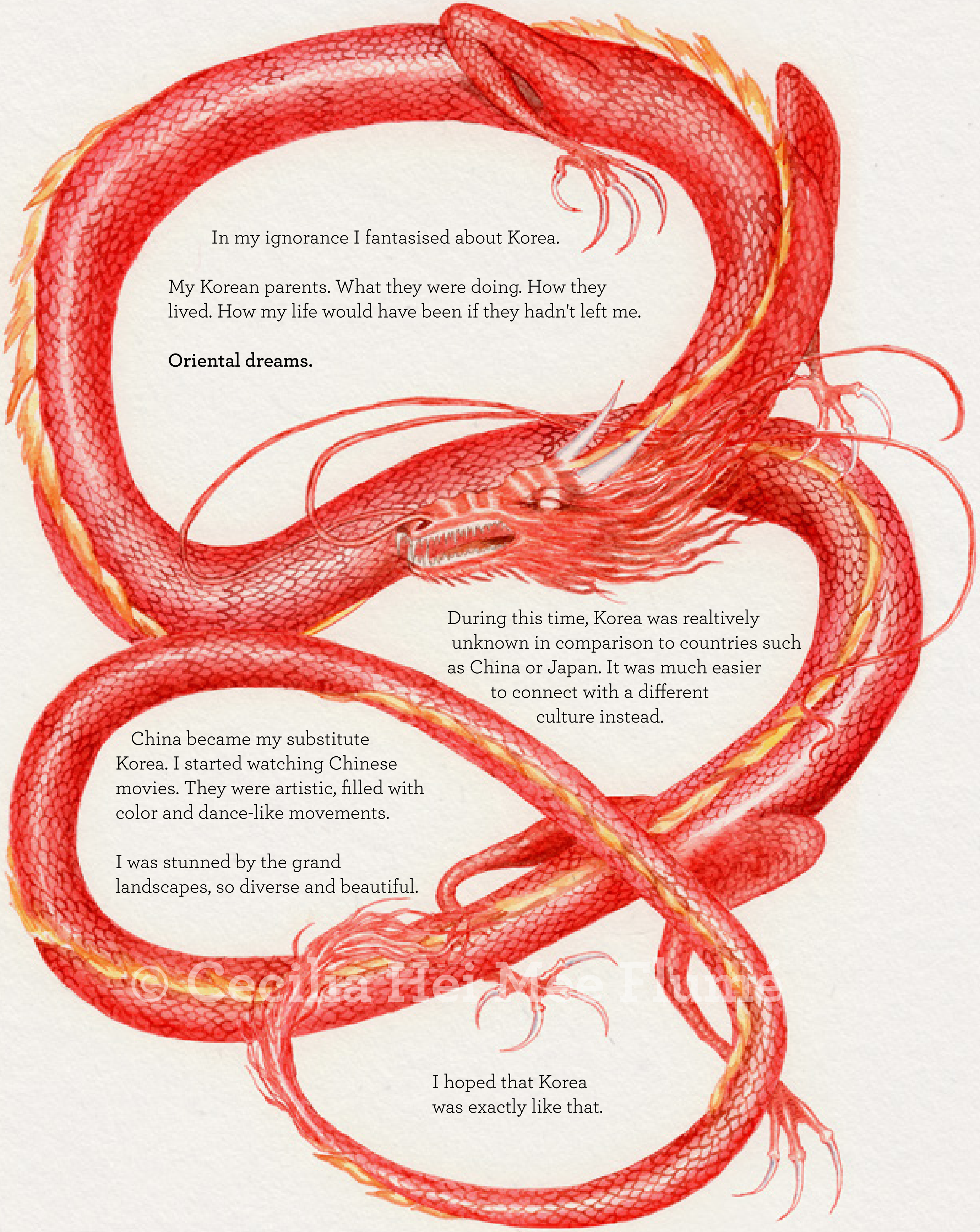
Ny studie: Adopterades ensamhet ökar risken för självmord

MYNDIGHETEN FÖR FAMILJERÄTT OCH FÖRÄLDRASKAPSSTÖD

Hälsa och sociala livsvillkor hos internationellt adopterade i vuxen ålder

Rapport från CHESS och Karolinska Institutet i samarbete med institutionen för socialt arbete vid Stockholms universitet på uppdrag av Myndigheten för familjerätt och föräldraskapsstöd (MFoF)

Anders Hjern[1] & Bo Vinnerljung[2]



In my ignorance I fantasised about Korea.

My Korean parents. What they were doing. How they lived. How my life would have been if they hadn't left me.

Oriental dreams.

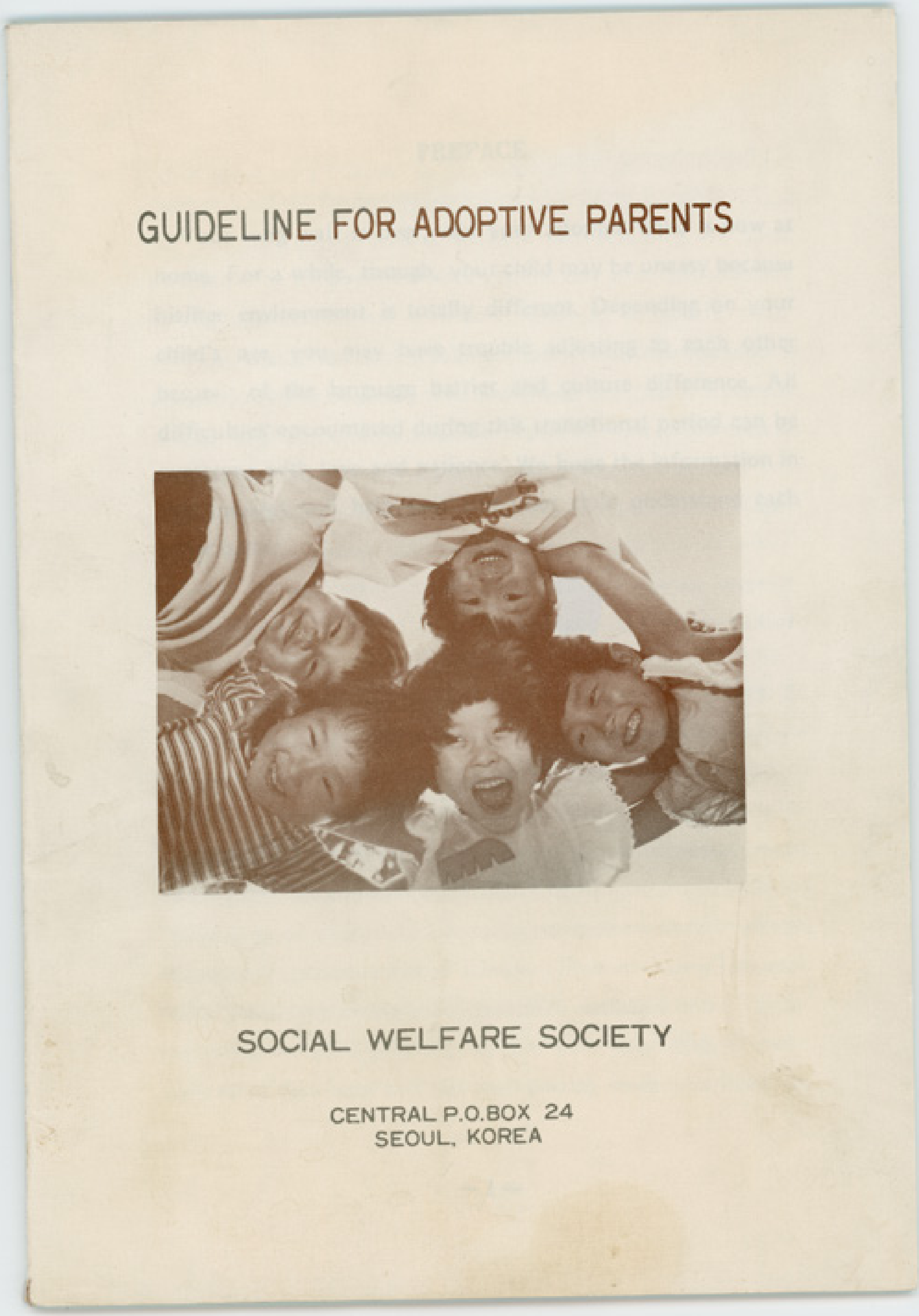
During this time, Korea was realtively unknown in comparison to countries such as China or Japan. It was much easier to connect with a different culture instead.

China became my substitute Korea. I started watching Chinese movies. They were artistic, filled with color and dance-like movements.

I was stunned by the grand landscapes, so diverse and beautiful.

I hoped that Korea was exactly like that.

© Cecilia Hei Mee Flume

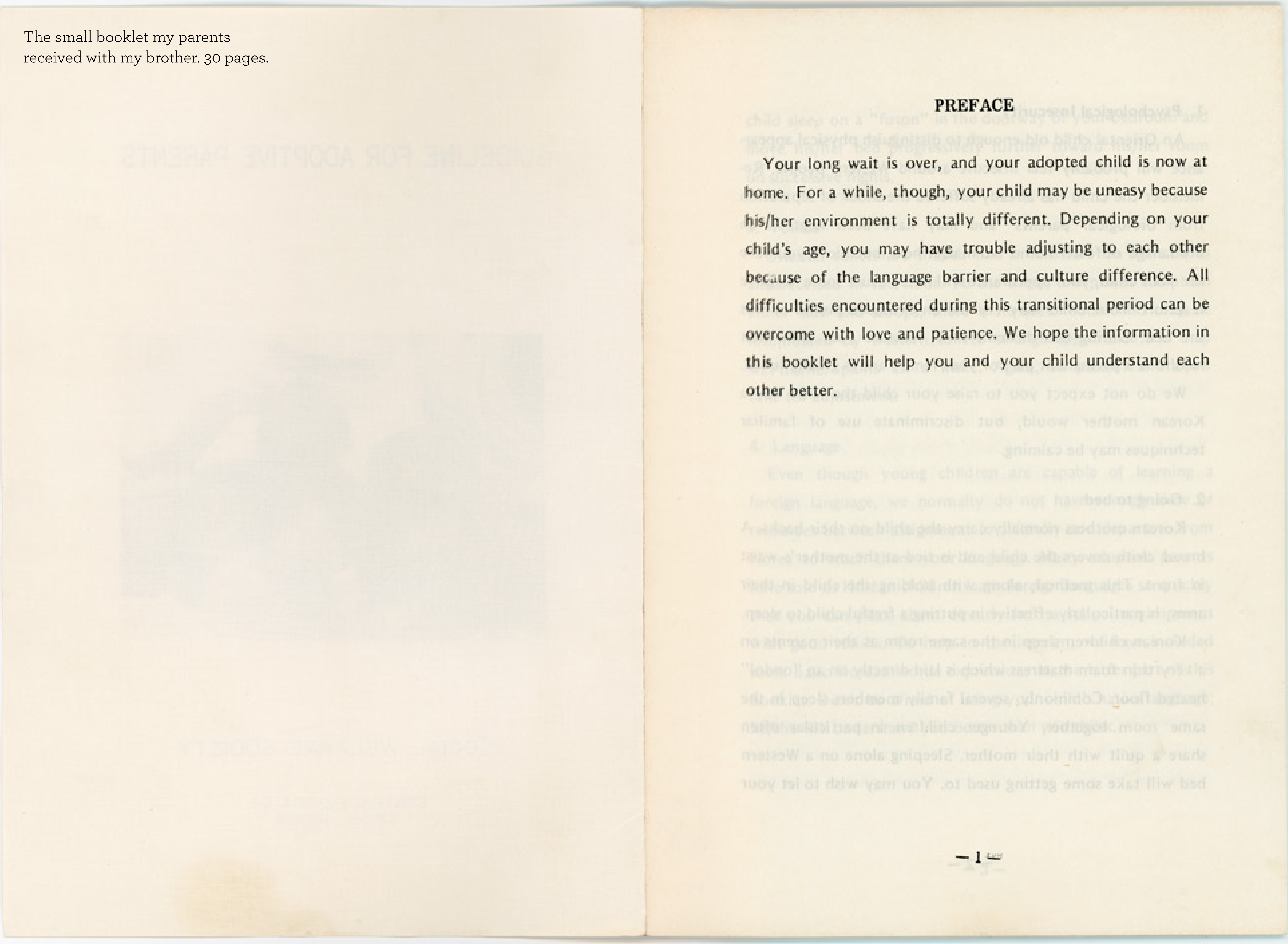


GUIDELINE FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

SOCIAL WELFARE SOCIETY

CENTRAL P.O.BOX 24
SEOUL, KOREA

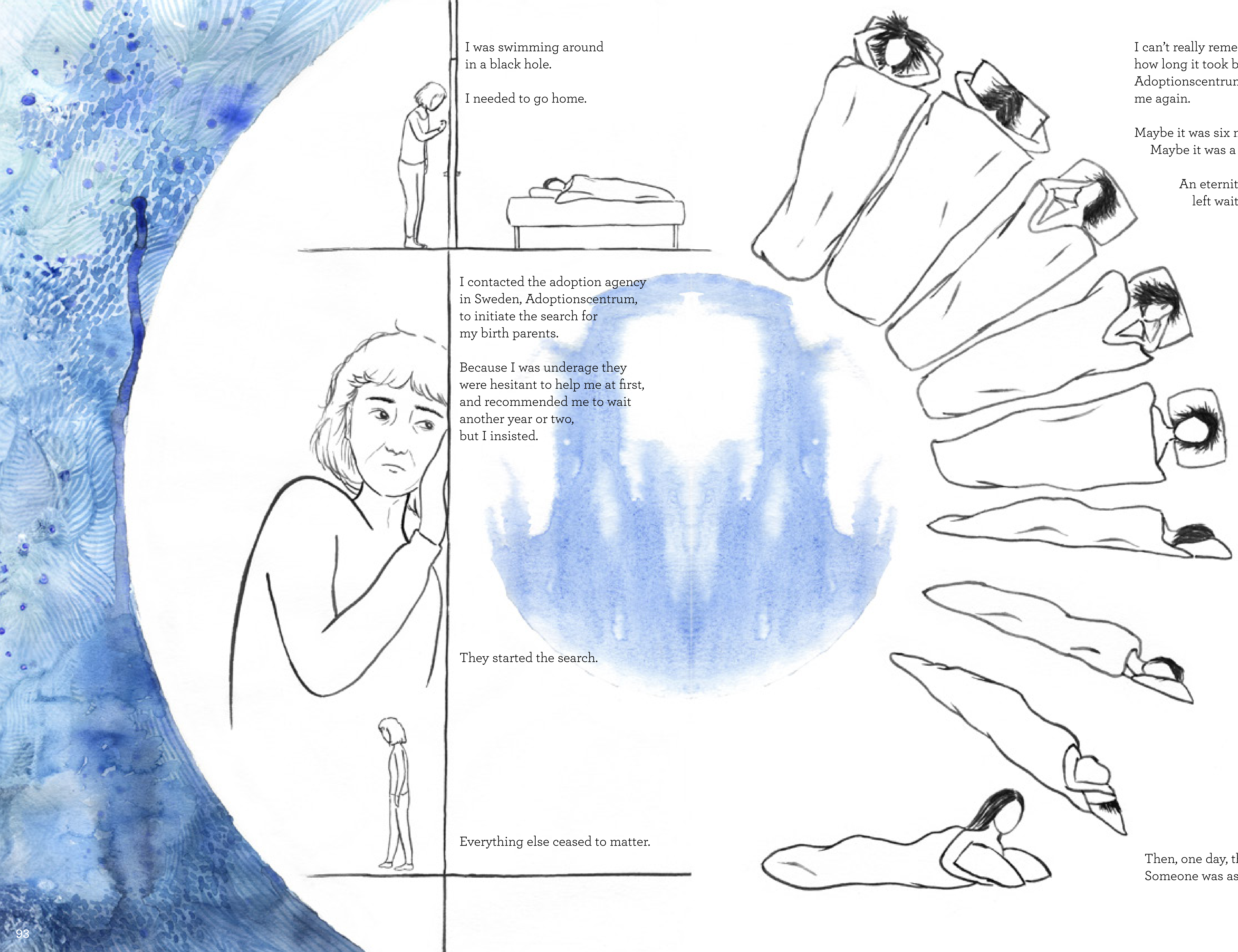
The small booklet my parents
received with my brother. 30 pages.



PREFACE

Your long wait is over, and your adopted child is now at home. For a while, though, your child may be uneasy because his/her environment is totally different. Depending on your child's age, you may have trouble adjusting to each other because of the language barrier and culture difference. All difficulties encountered during this transitional period can be overcome with love and patience. We hope the information in this booklet will help you and your child understand each other better.

— 1 —



I was swimming around
in a black hole.

I needed to go home.

I contacted the adoption agency
in Sweden, Adoptionscentrum,
to initiate the search for
my birth parents.

Because I was underage they
were hesitant to help me at first,
and recommended me to wait
another year or two,
but I insisted.

They started the search.

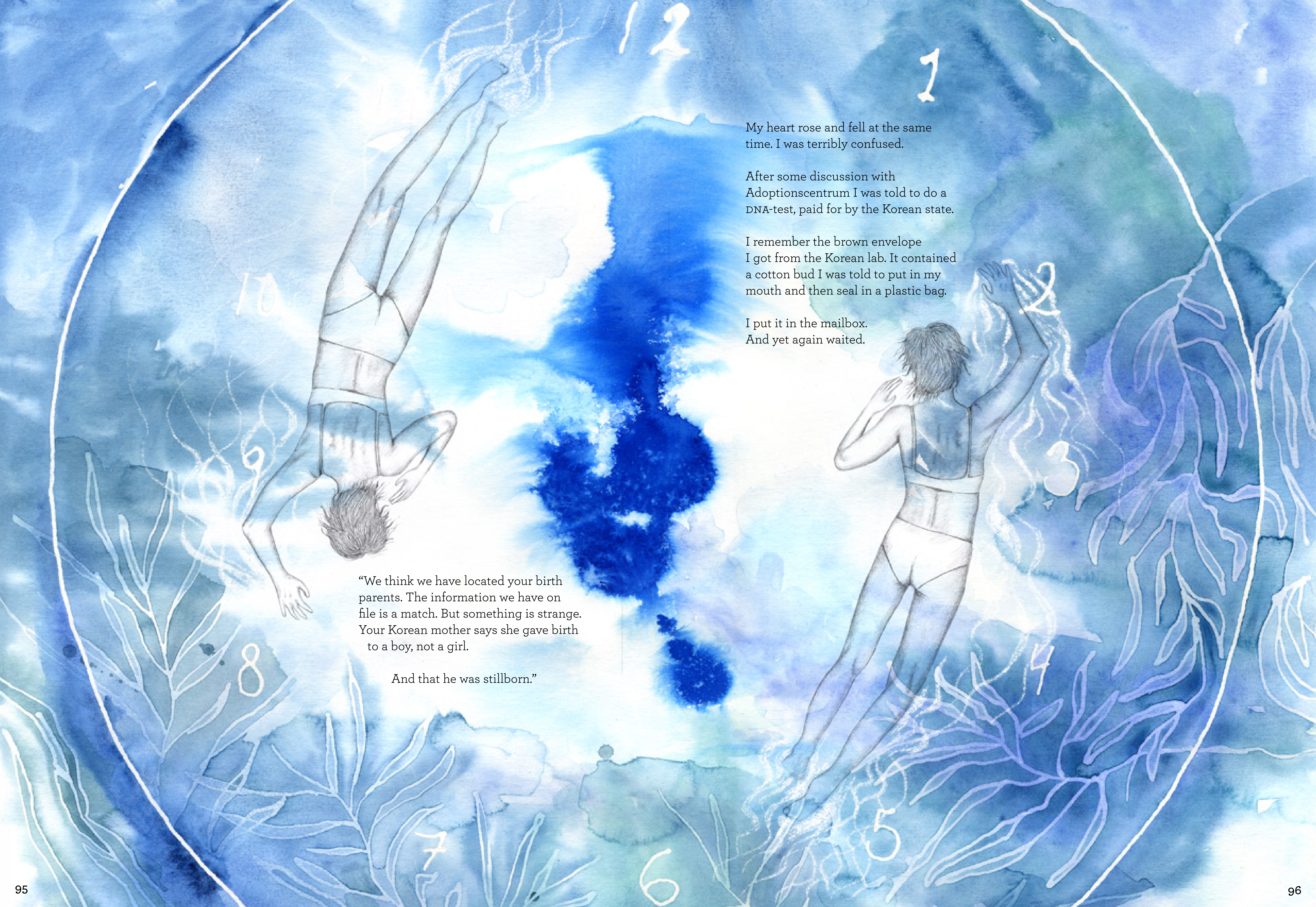
Everything else ceased to matter.

I can't really remember
how long it took before
Adoptionscentrum contacted
me again.

Maybe it was six months?
Maybe it was a year?

An eternity for someone
left waiting.

Then, one day, the phone rang.
Someone was asking for me.



“We think we have located your birth parents. The information we have on file is a match. But something is strange. Your Korean mother says she gave birth to a boy, not a girl.

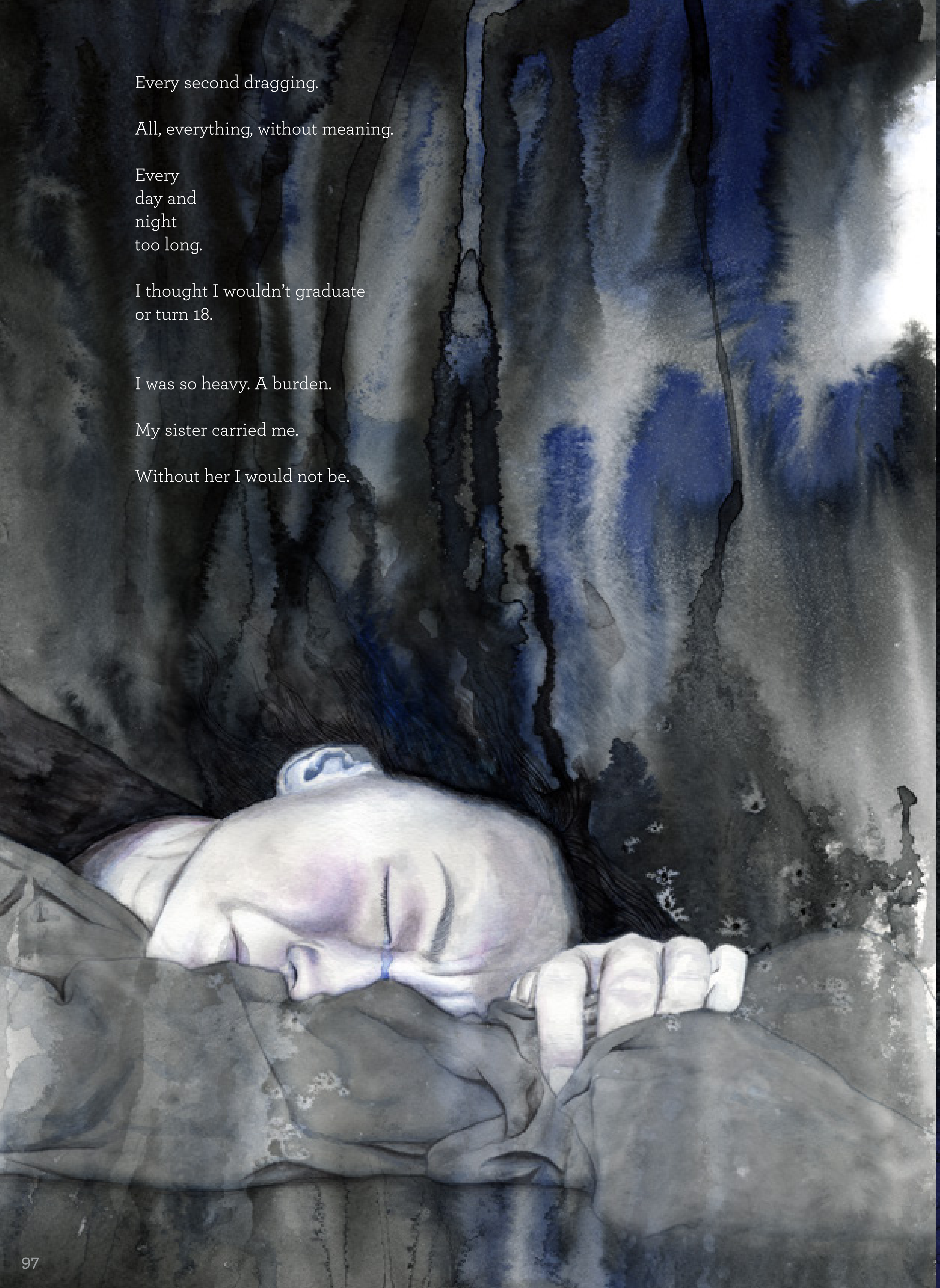
And that he was stillborn.”

My heart rose and fell at the same time. I was terribly confused.

After some discussion with Adoptionscentrum I was told to do a DNA-test, paid for by the Korean state.

I remember the brown envelope I got from the Korean lab. It contained a cotton bud I was told to put in my mouth and then seal in a plastic bag.

I put it in the mailbox.
And yet again waited.



Every second dragging.

All, everything, without meaning.

Every
day and
night
too long.

I thought I wouldn't graduate
or turn 18.

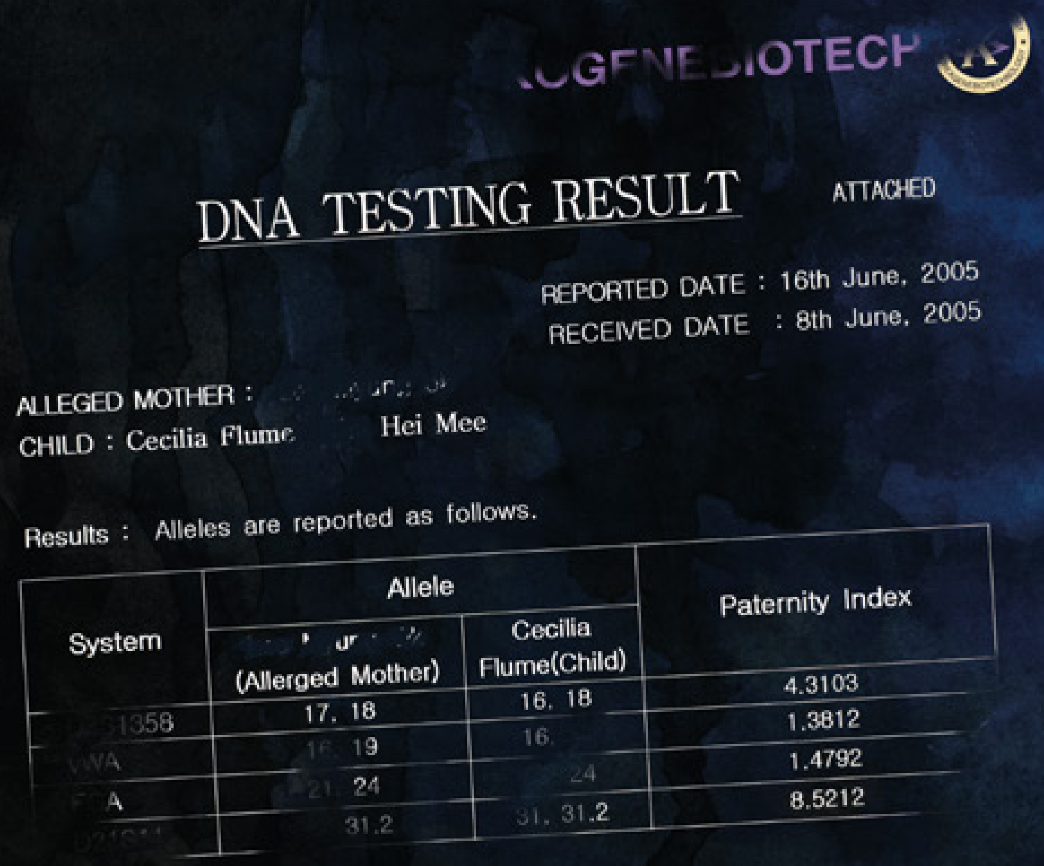
I was so heavy. A burden.

My sister carried me.

Without her I would not be.

When I received the lab result a month later it contained very few pages. A little information about the test and then the result.

The probability that she was my birth mother was 99.99999%



[illegible]GENEBIOTECH

DNA TESTING RESULT

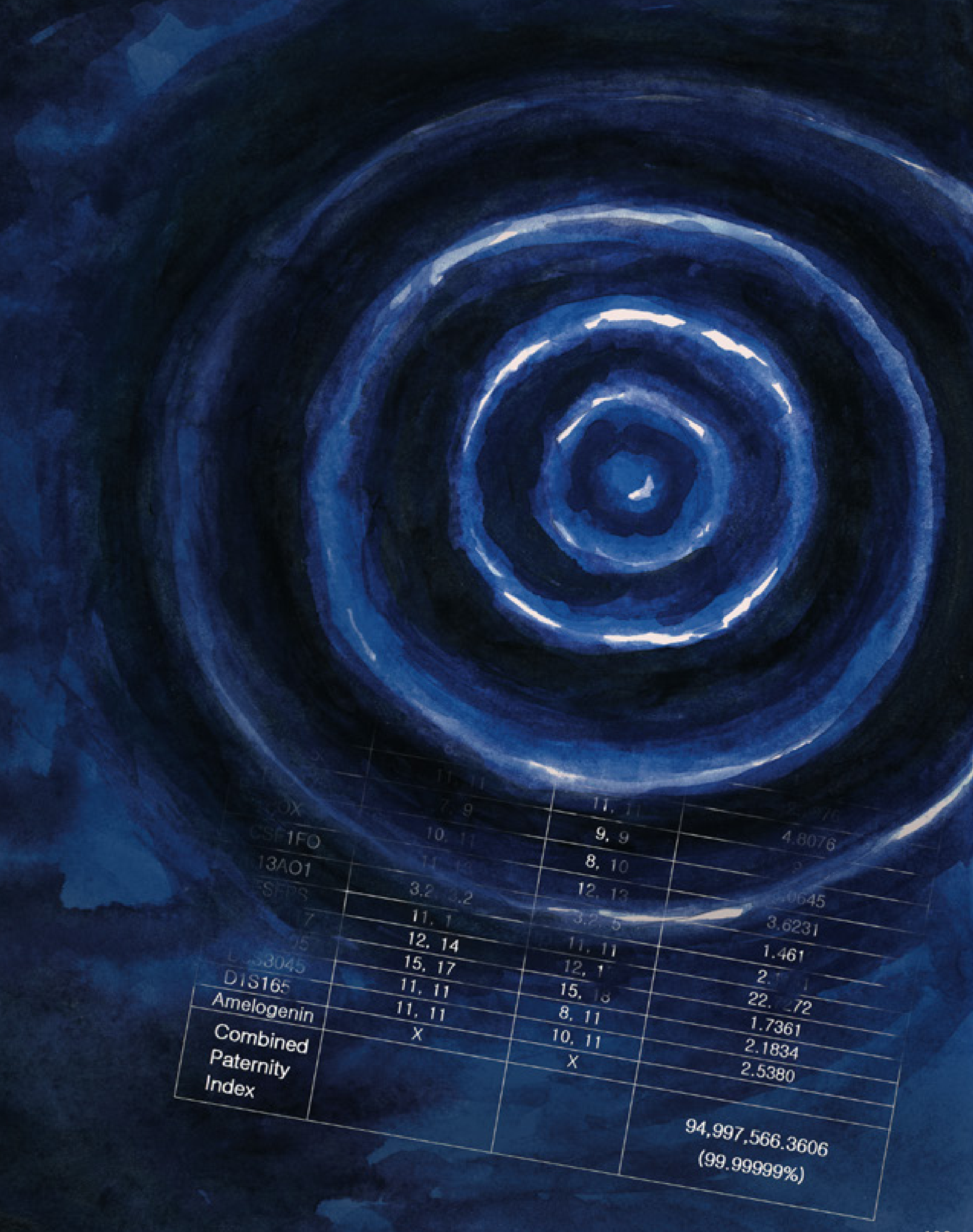
ATTACHED

REPORTED DATE : 16th June, 2005
RECEIVED DATE : 8th June, 2005

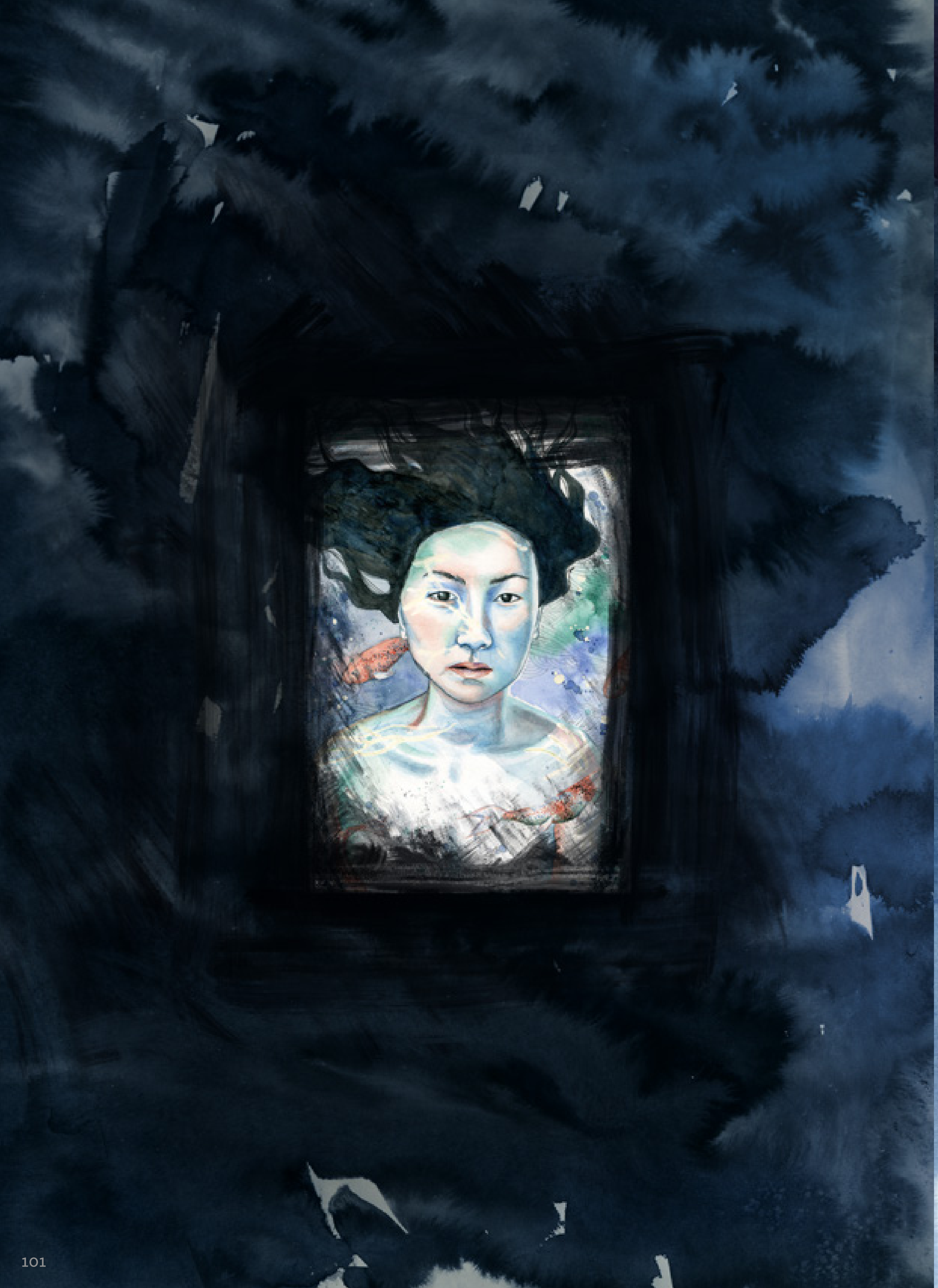
ALLEGED MOTHER : [illegible]
CHILD : Cecilia Flume Hei Mee

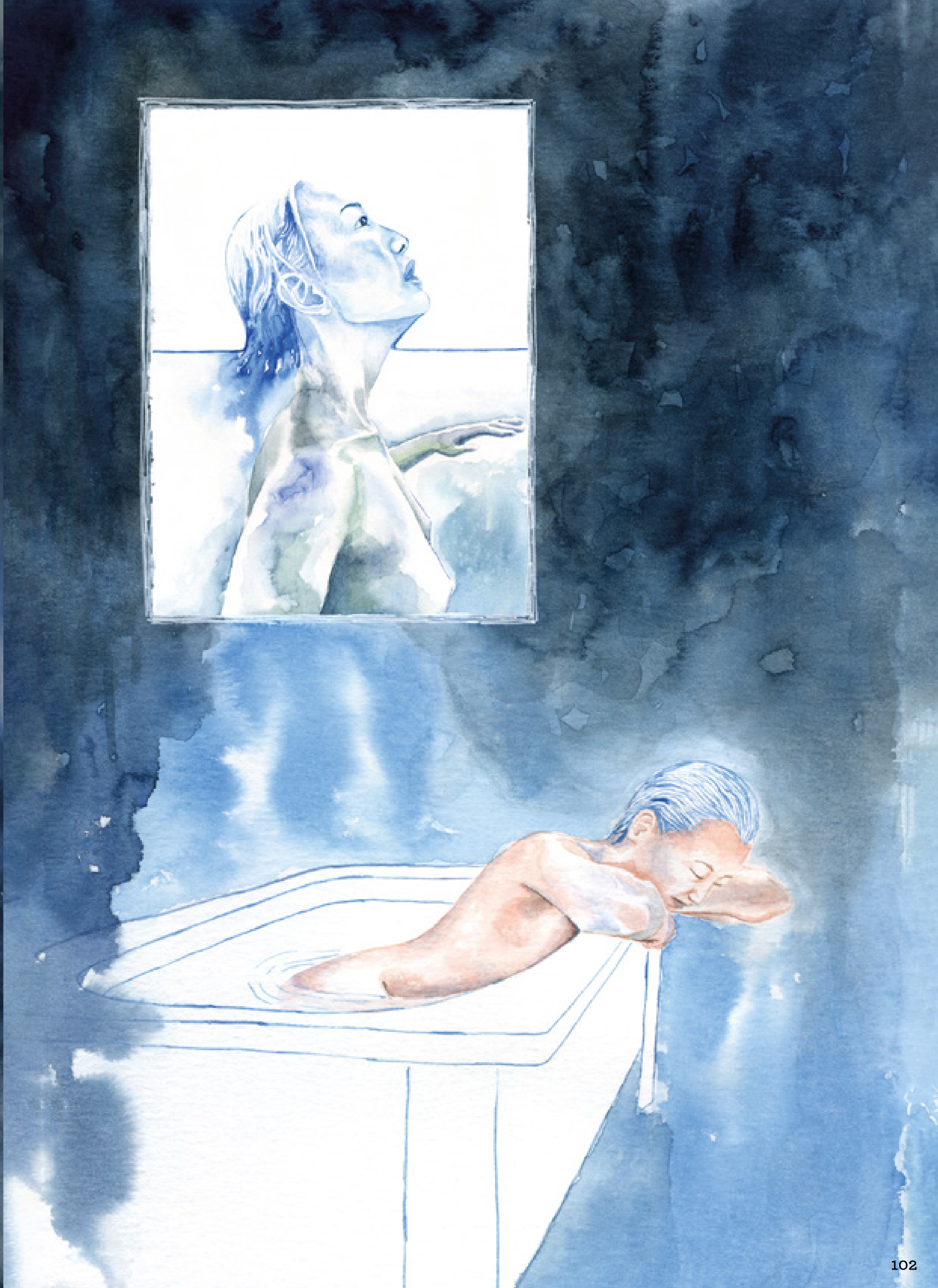
Results : Alleles are reported as follows.

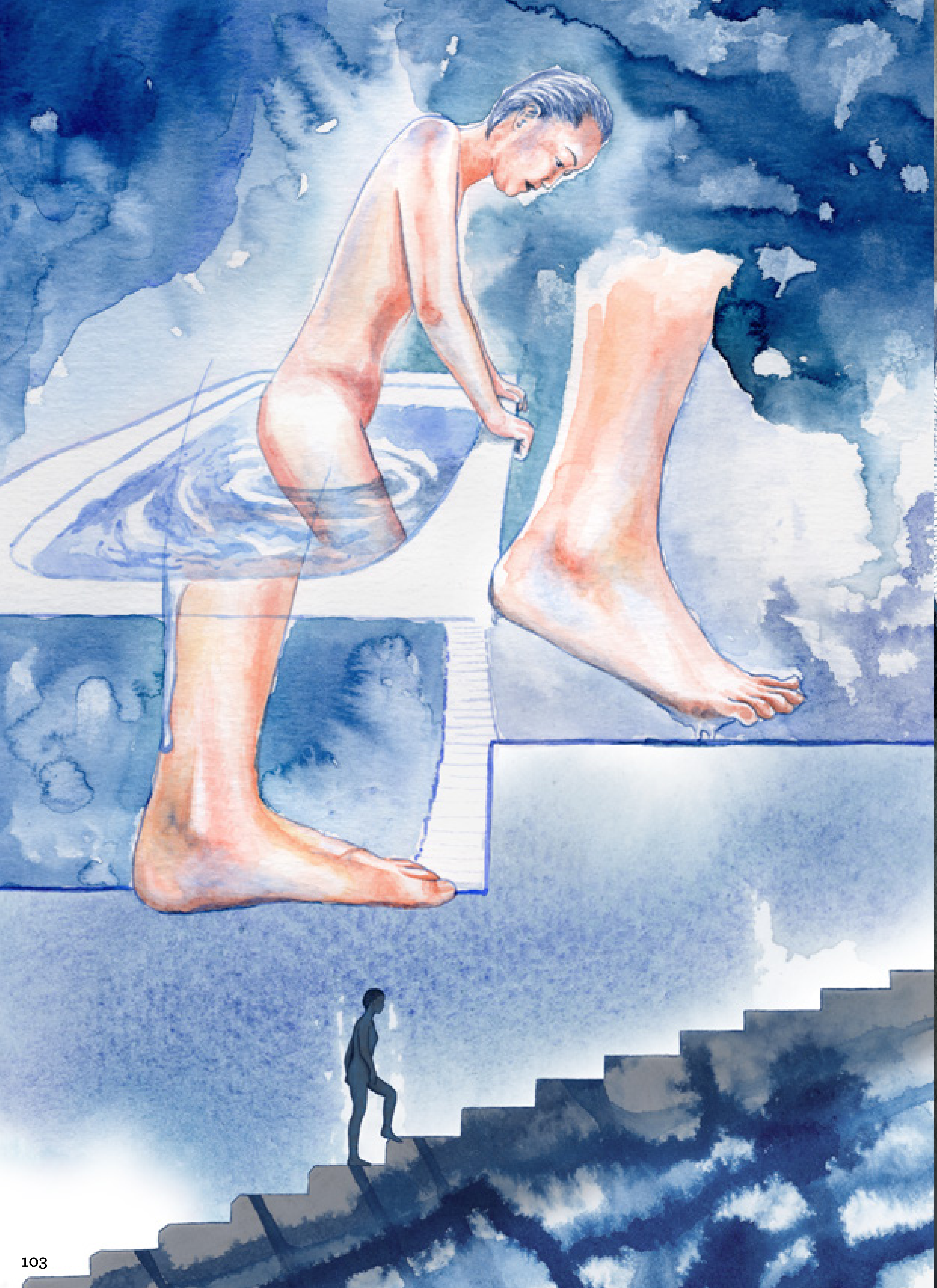
System	Allele		Paternity Index
	[illegible] (Allerged Mother)	Cecilia Flume(Child)	
[illegible]1358	17, 18	16, 18	4.3103
VWA	16, 19	16, [illegible]	1.3812
[illegible]A	21, 24	[illegible] 24	1.4792
[illegible]	31.2	31, 31.2	8.5212

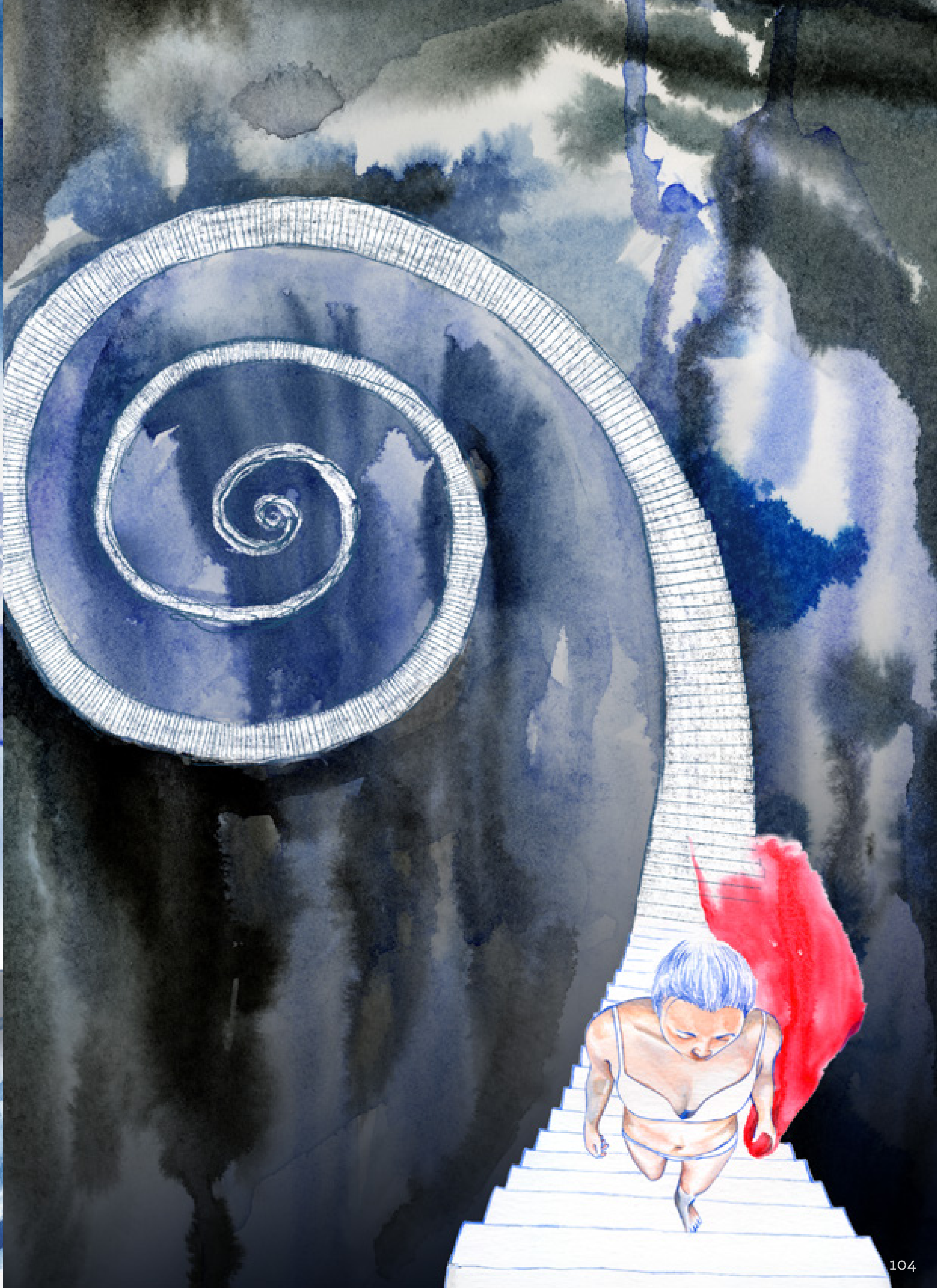


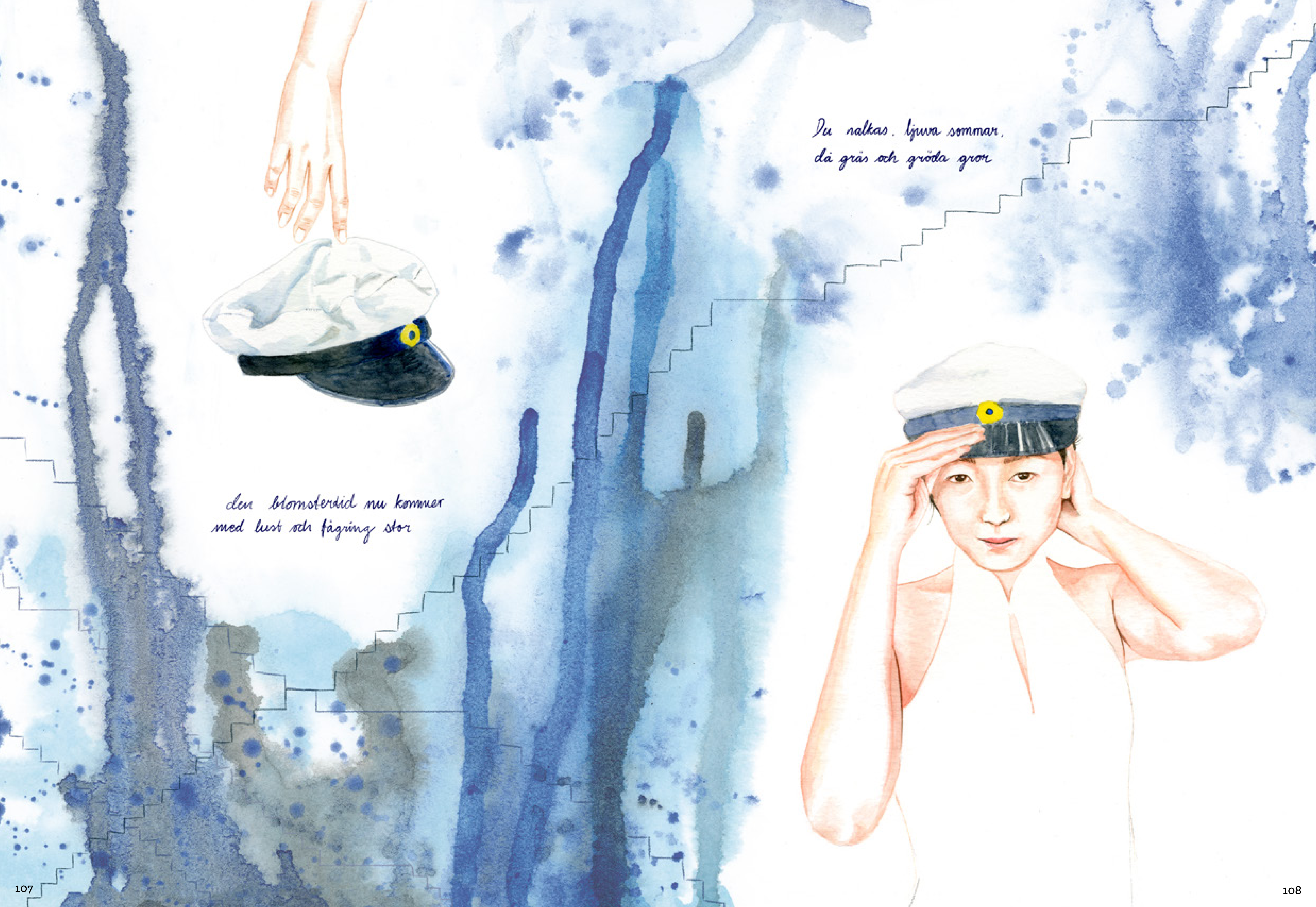
[illegible]	8, [illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]76
[illegible]	11, 11	11, 11	4.8076
[illegible]	7, 9	9, 9	[illegible]
[illegible]OX	10, 11	8, 10	[illegible]0645
CSF1FO	11, [illegible]	12, 13	3.6231
13AO1	3.2, 3.2	3.2, [illegible]5	1.461
FESFPS	11, 1[illegible]	11, 11	2.[illegible]
[illegible]7	12, 14	12, 1[illegible]	22.[illegible]72
[illegible]5	15, 17	15, [illegible]	1.7361
[illegible]S3045	11, 11	8, 11	2.1834
D1S165	11, 11	10, 11	2.5380
Amelogenin	X	X	
Combined Paternity Index			94,997,566.3606 (99.99999%)





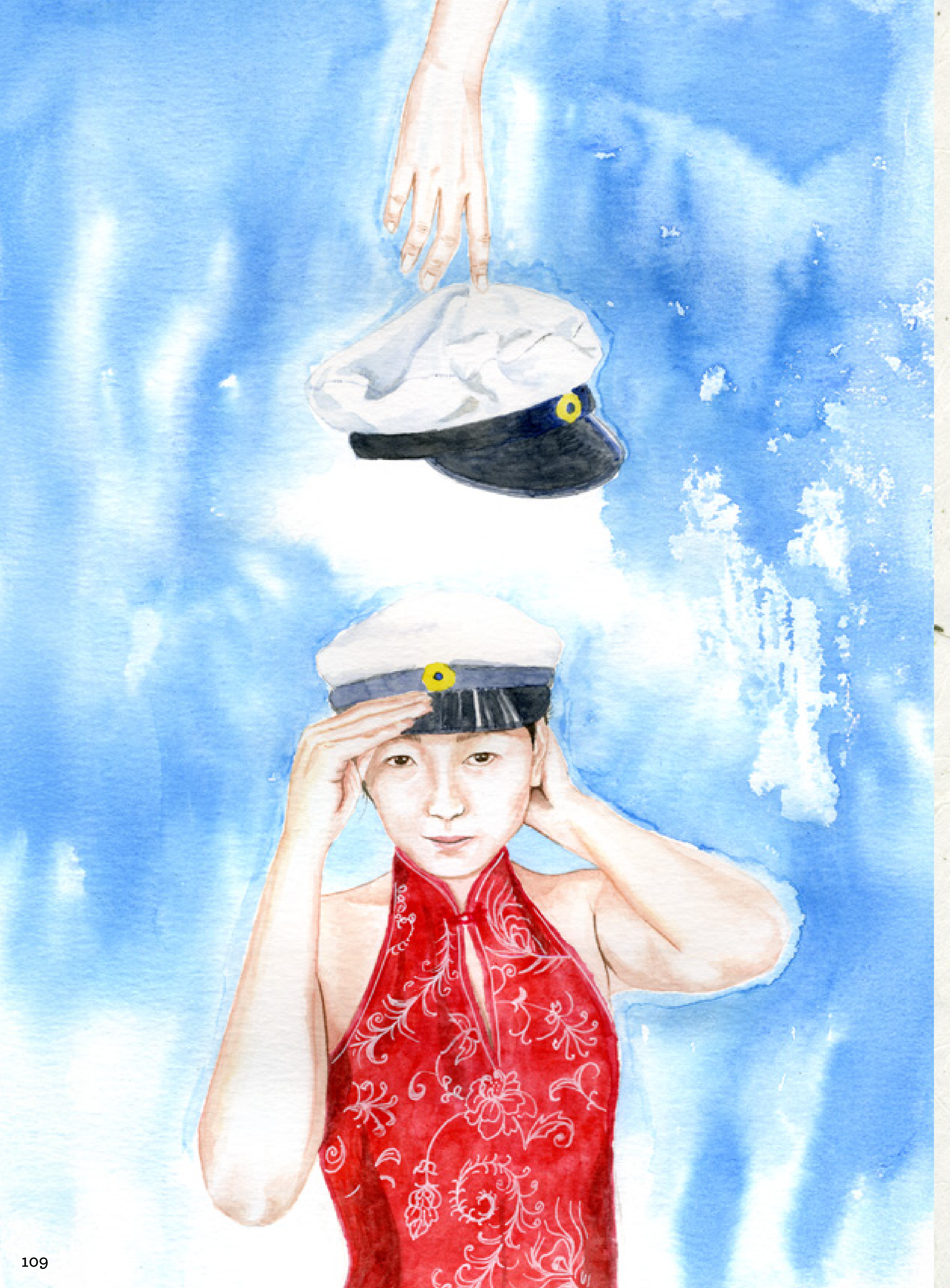




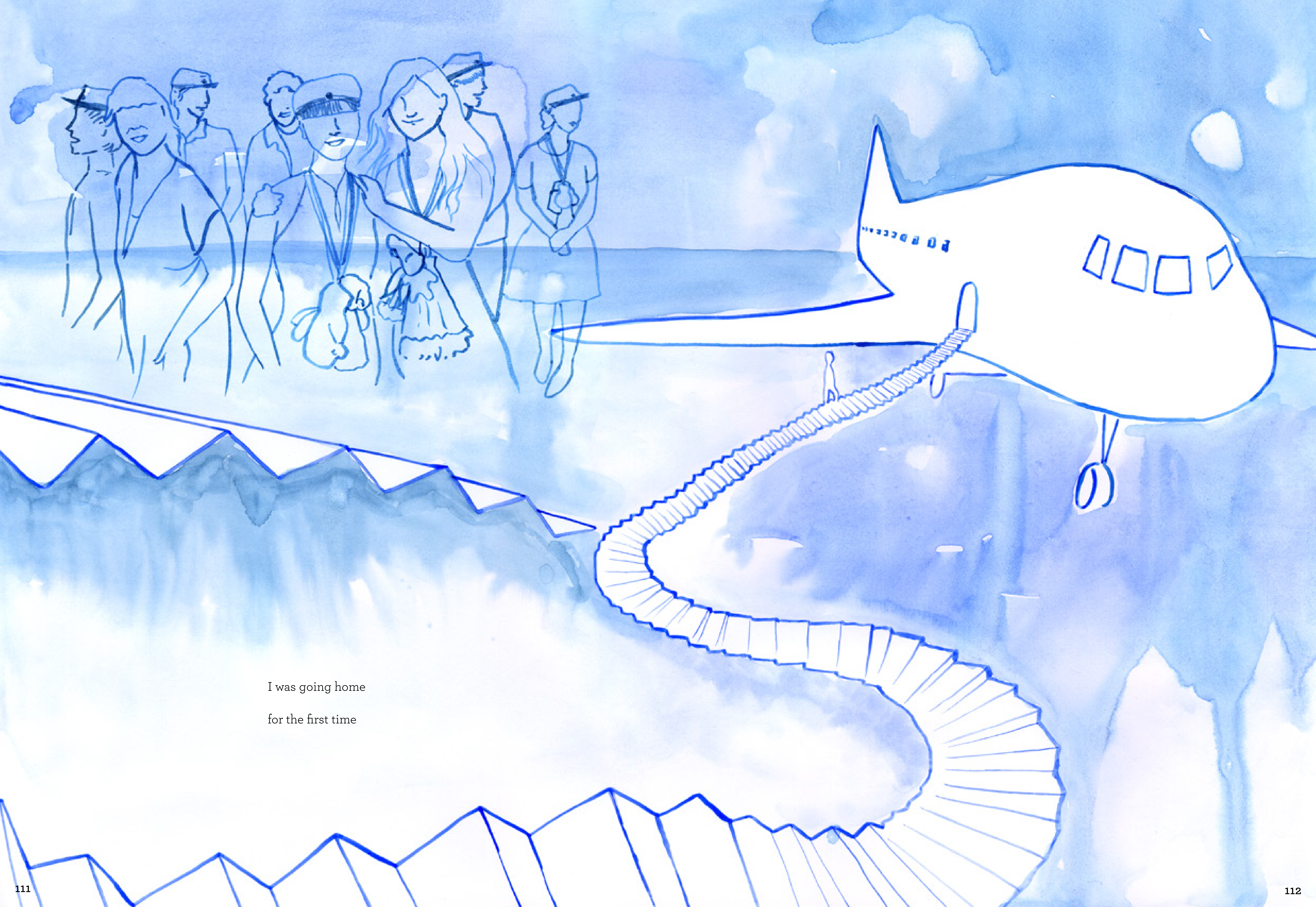


den blomstertid nu kommer
med lust och fägring stor

Du nalkas, ljuva sommar,
då gräs och gröda gror



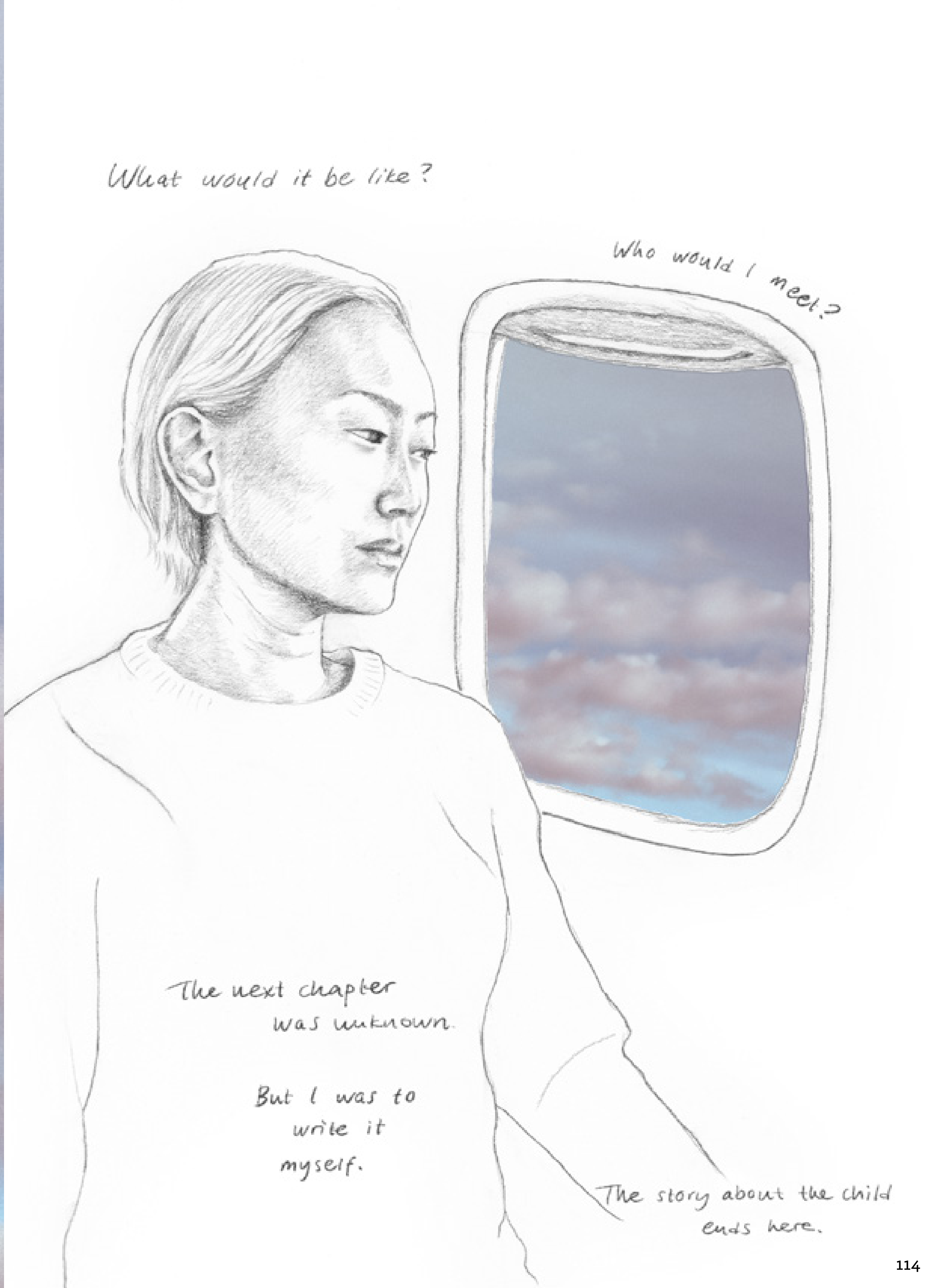
Med blid och livlig värma
till allt som varit dött
sig solens strålar närma
och allt blir återfött.



I was going home

for the first time

I didn't dare to guess
what was ahead of me.



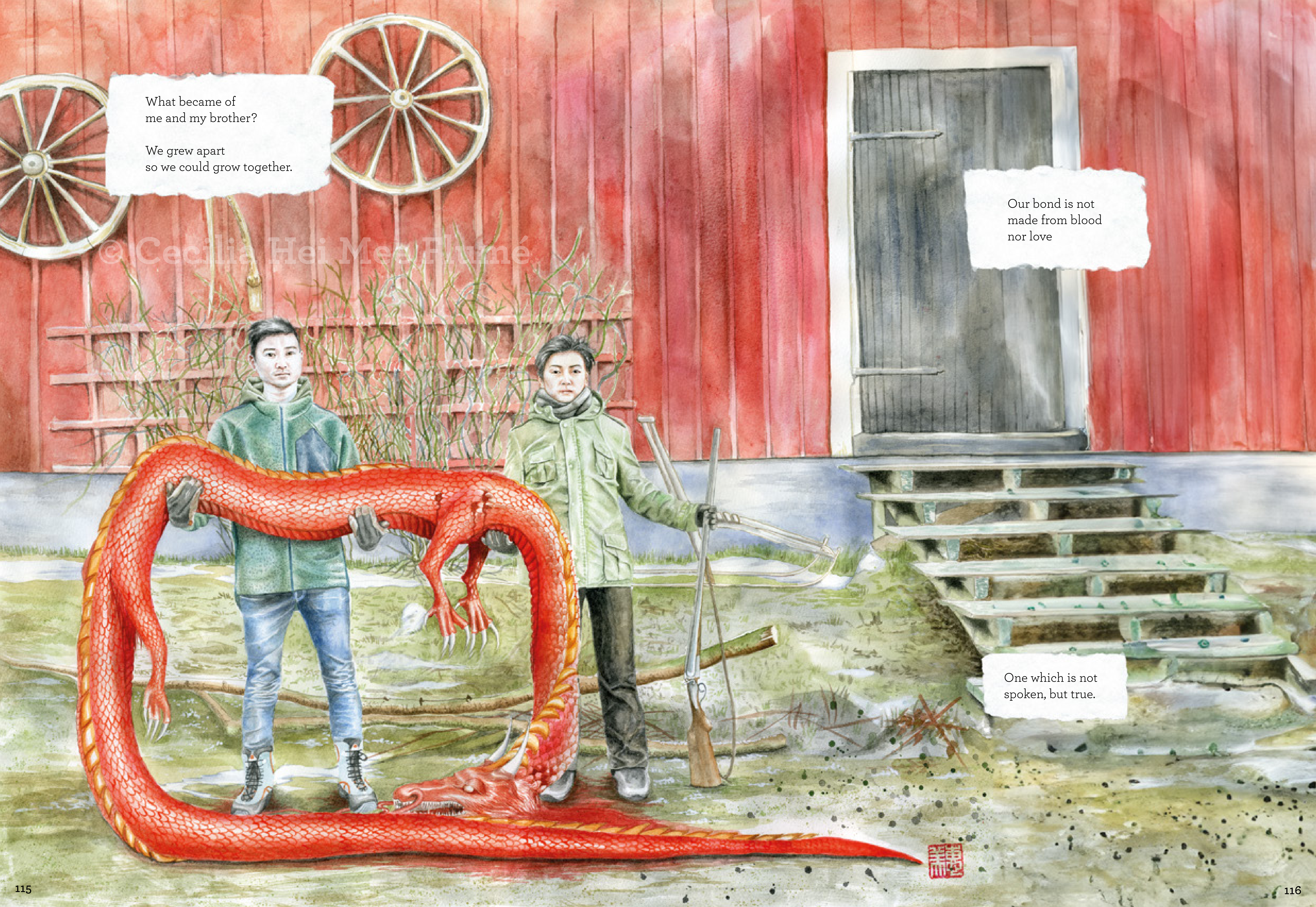
What would it be like?

Who would I meet?

The next chapter
was unknown.

But I was to
write it
myself.

The story about the child
ends here.



What became of
me and my brother?

We grew apart
so we could grow together.

Our bond is not
made from blood
nor love

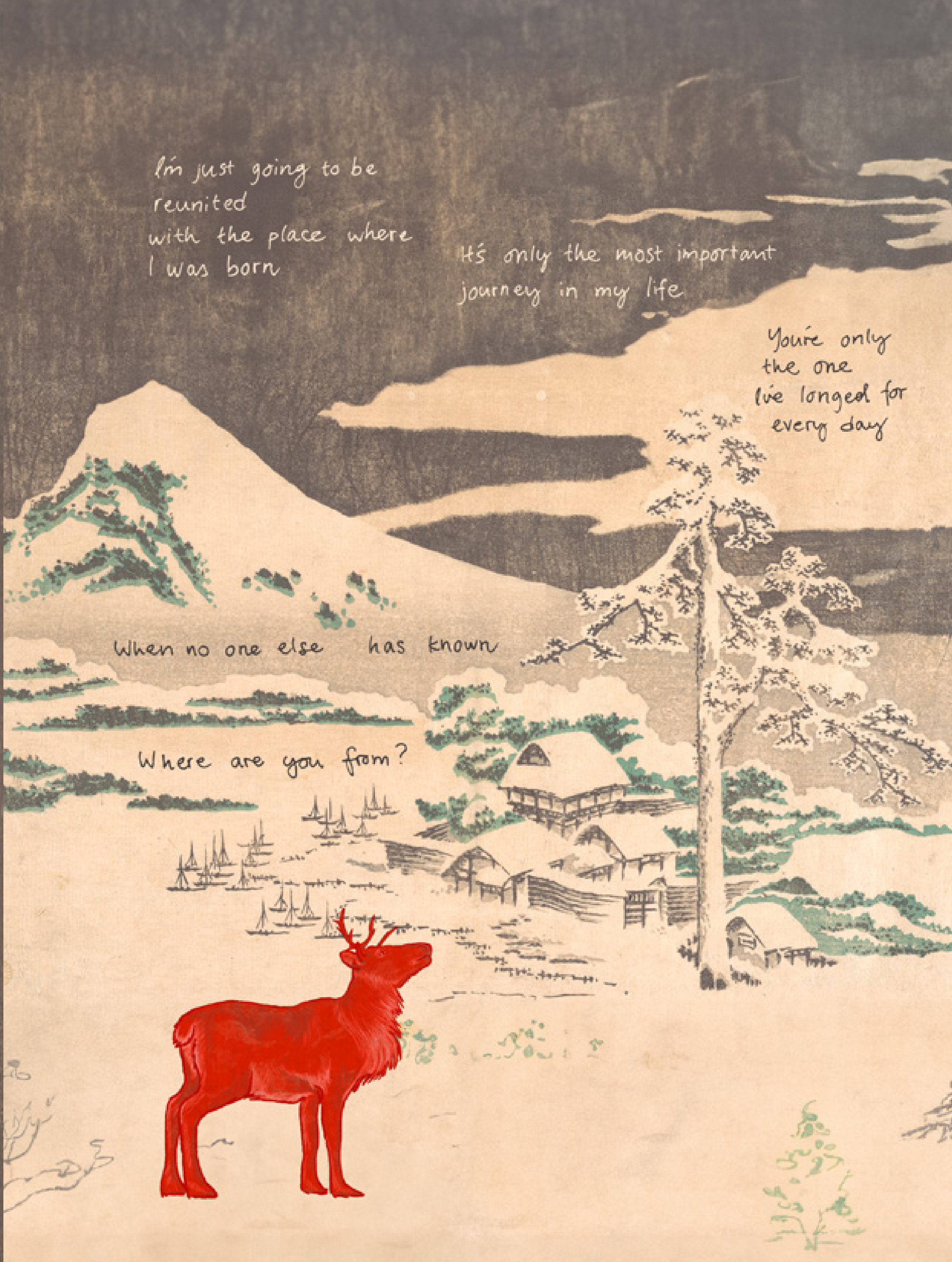
One which is not
spoken, but true.

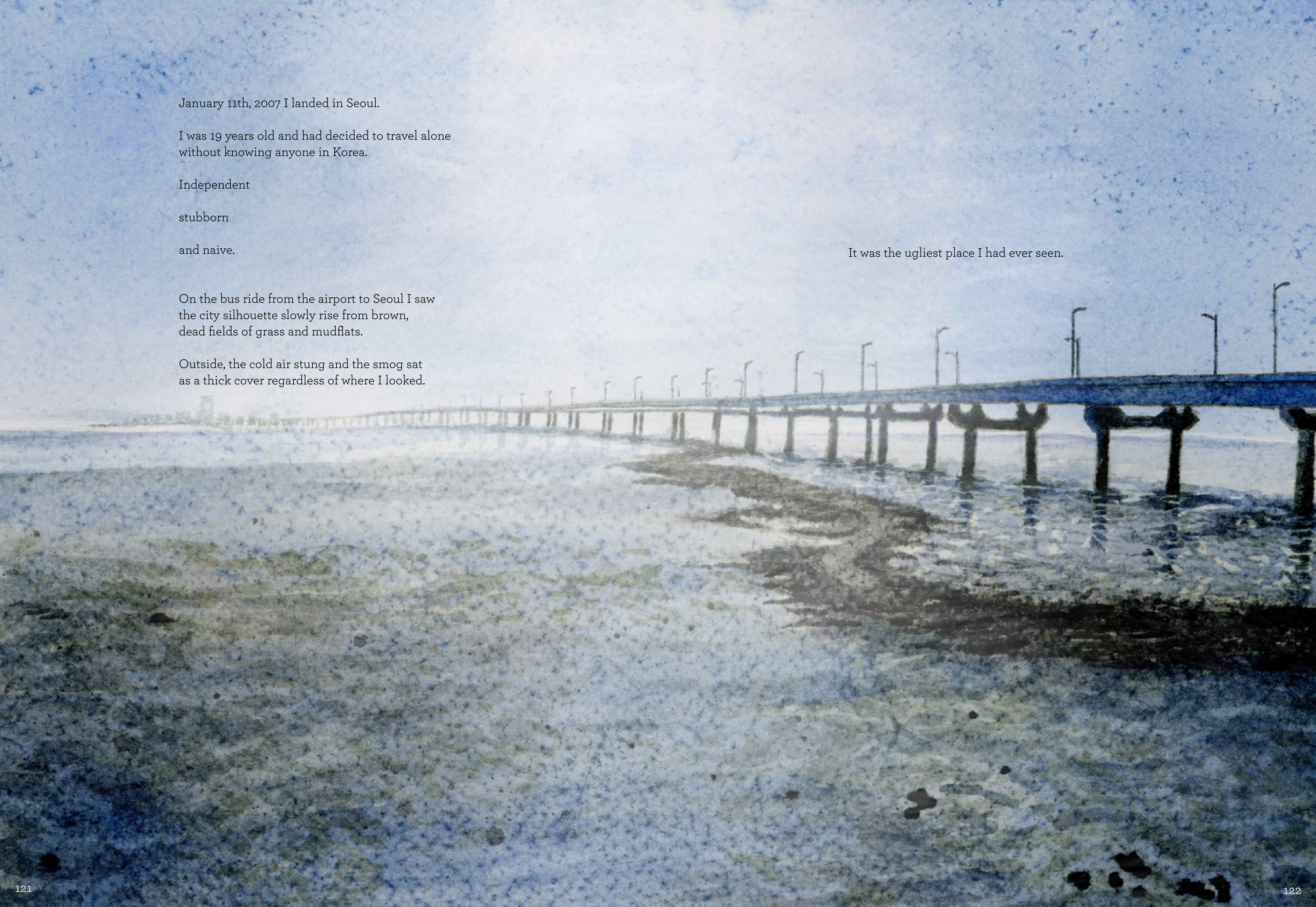
© Cecilia Hei Mee Flumé

Chapter 3

deer horns
developing their first branch:
our separation

–Basho


I'm just going to be
reunited
with the place where
I was born
It's only the most important
journey in my life
You're only
the one
I've longed for
every day
When no one else has known
Where are you from?



January 11th, 2007 I landed in Seoul.

I was 19 years old and had decided to travel alone
without knowing anyone in Korea.

Independent

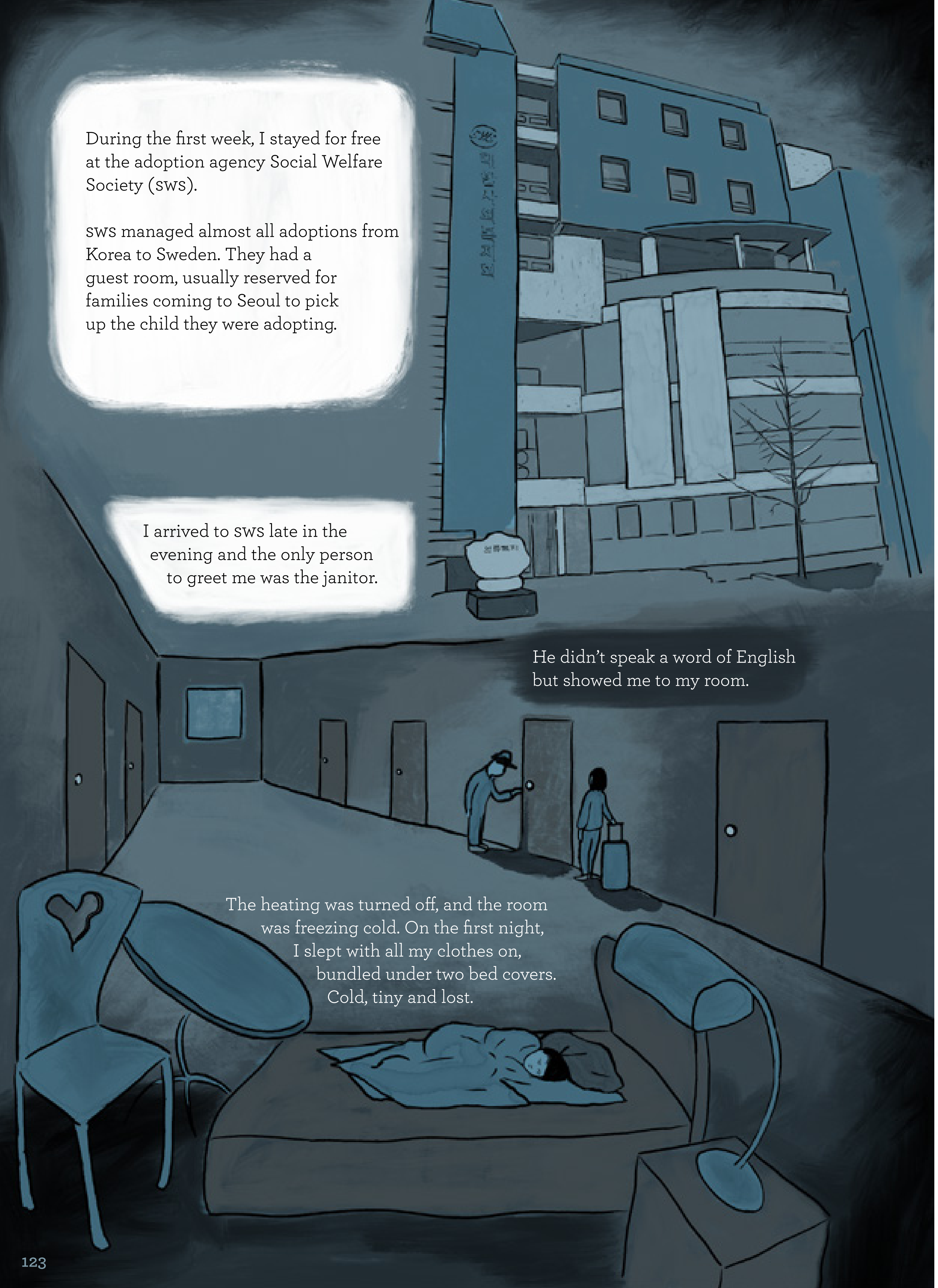
stubborn

and naive.

On the bus ride from the airport to Seoul I saw
the city silhouette slowly rise from brown,
dead fields of grass and mudflats.

Outside, the cold air stung and the smog sat
as a thick cover regardless of where I looked.

It was the ugliest place I had ever seen.



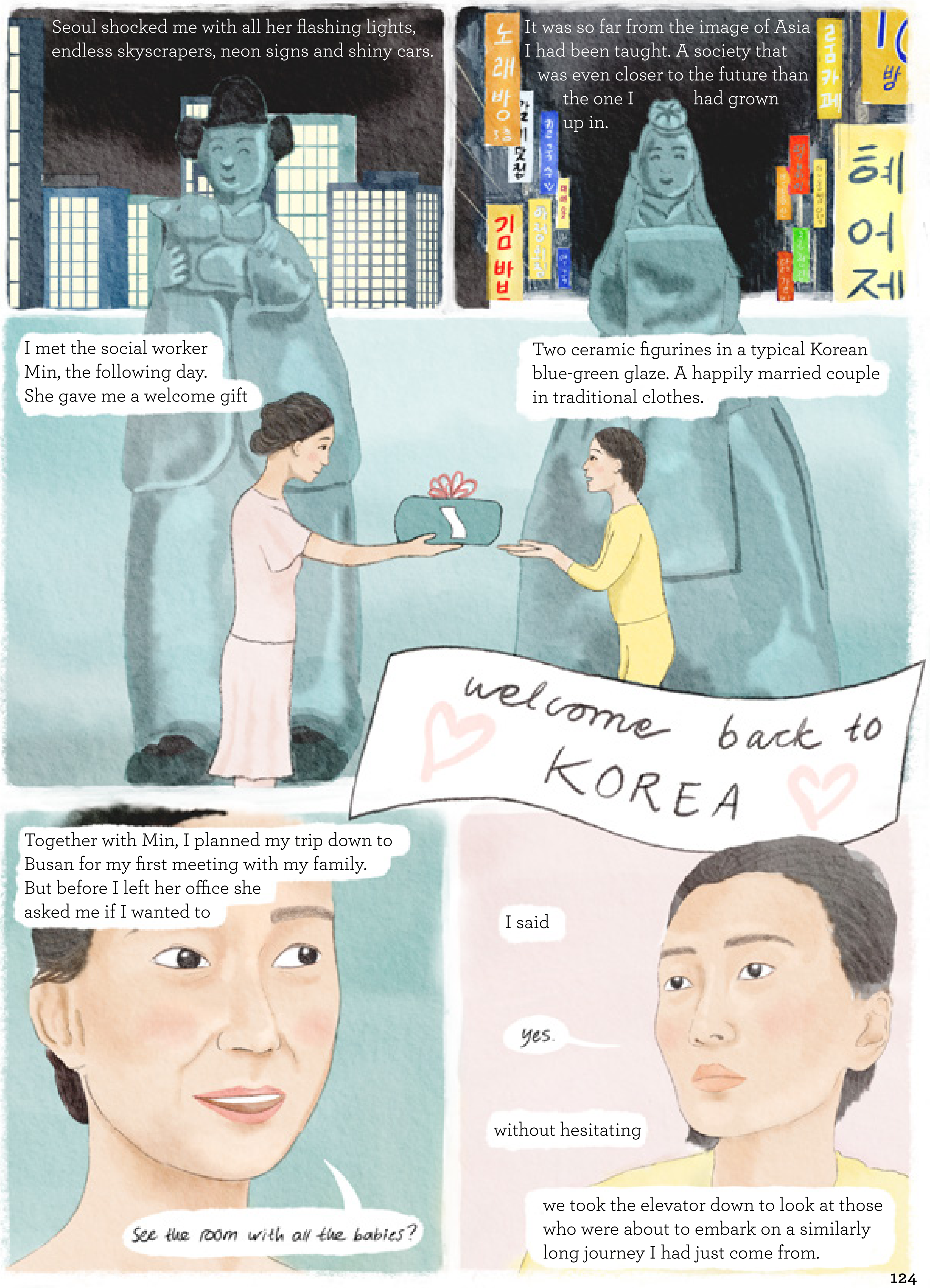
During the first week, I stayed for free at the adoption agency Social Welfare Society (SWS).

SWS managed almost all adoptions from Korea to Sweden. They had a guest room, usually reserved for families coming to Seoul to pick up the child they were adopting.

I arrived to SWS late in the evening and the only person to greet me was the janitor.

He didn't speak a word of English but showed me to my room.

The heating was turned off, and the room was freezing cold. On the first night, I slept with all my clothes on, bundled under two bed covers. Cold, tiny and lost.



Seoul shocked me with all her flashing lights, endless skyscrapers, neon signs and shiny cars.

It was so far from the image of Asia I had been taught. A society that was even closer to the future than the one I had grown up in.

I met the social worker Min, the following day. She gave me a welcome gift

Two ceramic figurines in a typical Korean blue-green glaze. A happily married couple in traditional clothes.

Together with Min, I planned my trip down to Busan for my first meeting with my family. But before I left her office she asked me if I wanted to

I said

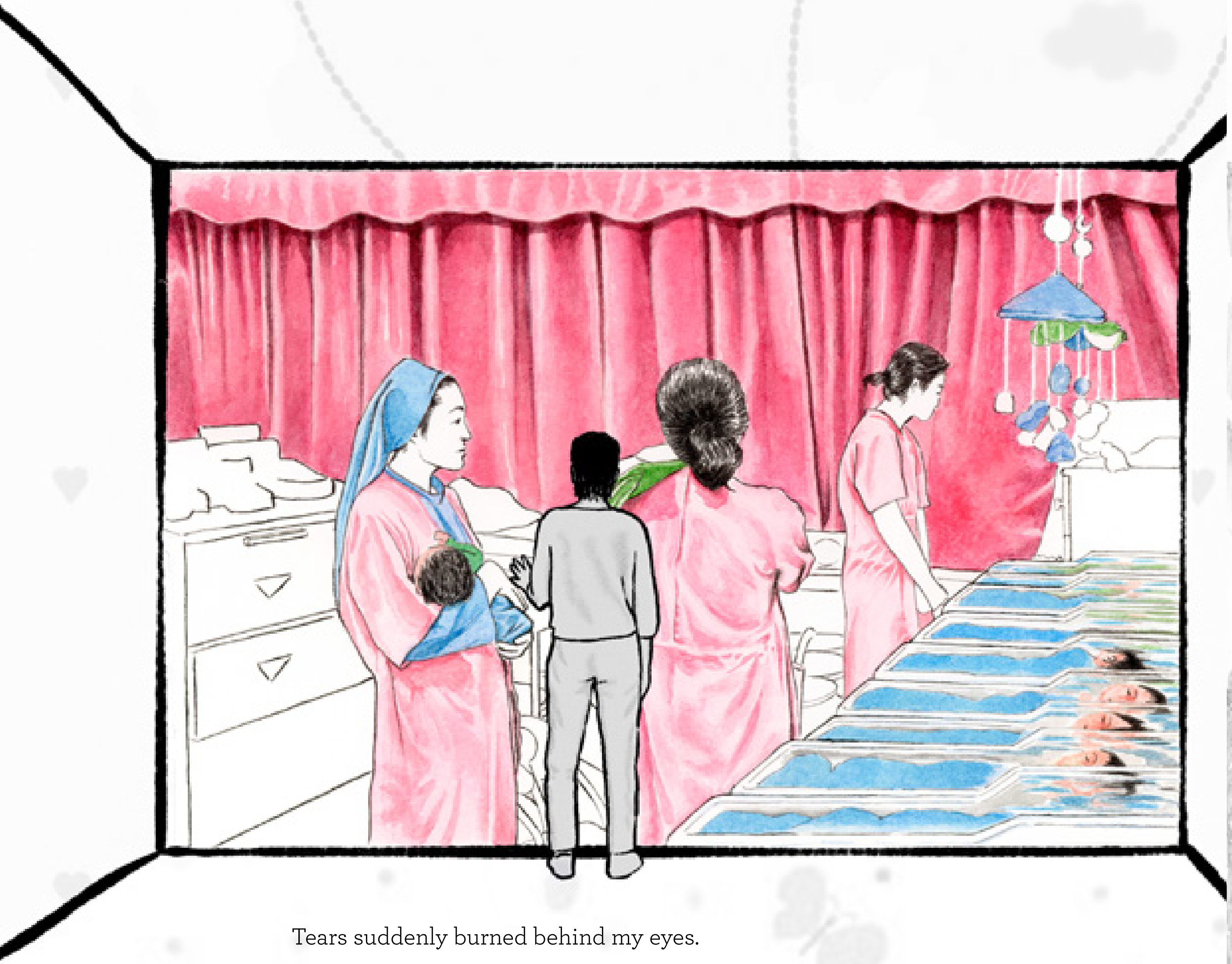
without hesitating

we took the elevator down to look at those who were about to embark on a similarly long journey I had just come from.

The window to the room I wasn't allowed to enter was big. Like the windows you see in hospitals on TV. It struck me that they reminded me of shopping windows.

In there all the baby cribs were aligned in neat rows and the caretakers criss-crossed between them.

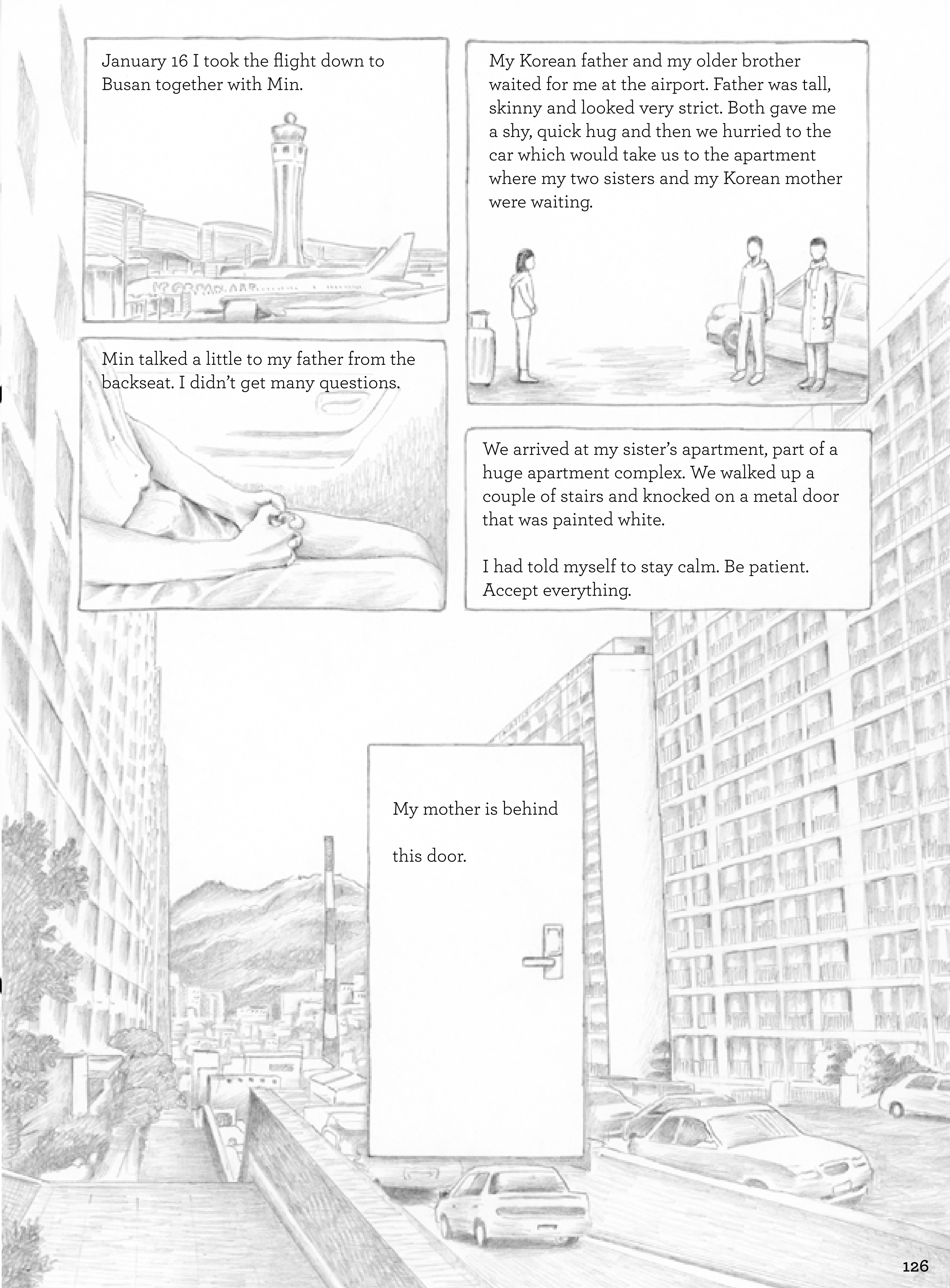
They all wore clean, pink aprons.



Tears suddenly burned behind my eyes.

I asked the social worker if I could leave.

Without understanding my emotions, I returned to my room.



January 16 I took the flight down to Busan together with Min.

My Korean father and my older brother waited for me at the airport. Father was tall, skinny and looked very strict. Both gave me a shy, quick hug and then we hurried to the car which would take us to the apartment where my two sisters and my Korean mother were waiting.

Min talked a little to my father from the backseat. I didn't get many questions.

We arrived at my sister's apartment, part of a huge apartment complex. We walked up a couple of stairs and knocked on a metal door that was painted white.

I had told myself to stay calm. Be patient. Accept everything.

My mother is behind

this door.

When the door opened, my two older sisters stood with my mother and her three grandchildren. I hugged them all.

My mother was short, chubby, loud, and bold. She didn't have my eyes.

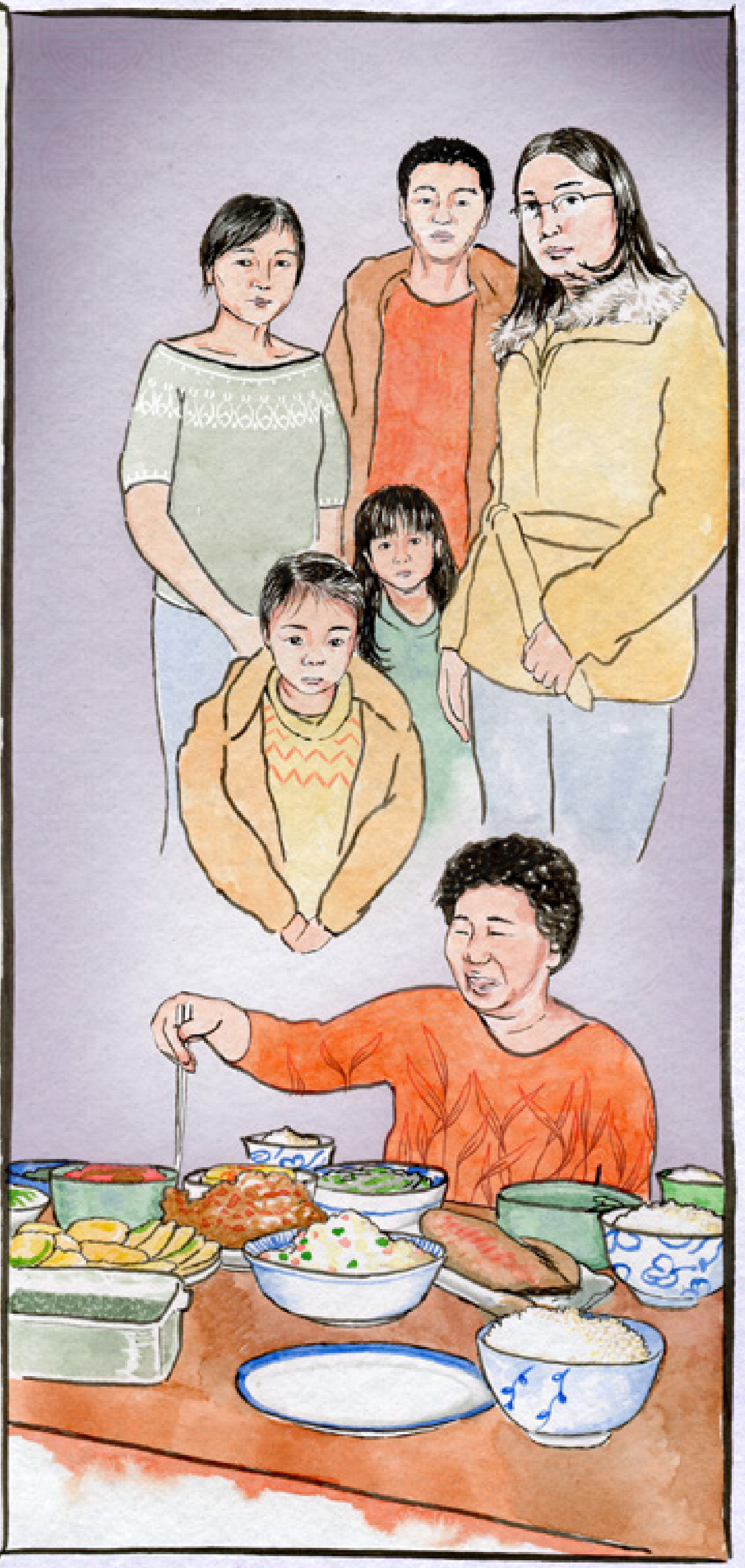
The younger of my two sisters said I looked like my brother and oldest sister, but I couldn't see it.

For a moment, I was scared, what if it was the wrong family? I had to remind myself of the blood and DNA tests we took.

My mother served a grand lunch. I tried everything, though much was unfamiliar, strange, and too spicy. They insisted I eat the fermented cabbage, kimchi. I tasted it and hid how awful I thought it was.

I planned to stay a few weeks and Min returned to Seoul that evening.

I fell asleep feeling anxious, disappointed, and underwhelmed. It hadn't been like the dramatic, tearful reunions I'd seen on TV.



With the help of a translator, my family explained to me that I had been born one month prematurely.

My mother had been in pain and delivered quickly in a small clinic, far from a proper hospital but typical for the time.

Mother, who was quite ill, had felt how I had come out, but couldn't hear any crying.

The midwife told her that she gave birth to a stillborn baby, a boy, and carried me out of the room.

Mother didn't want to hold me and a couple of hours later they were sent home.

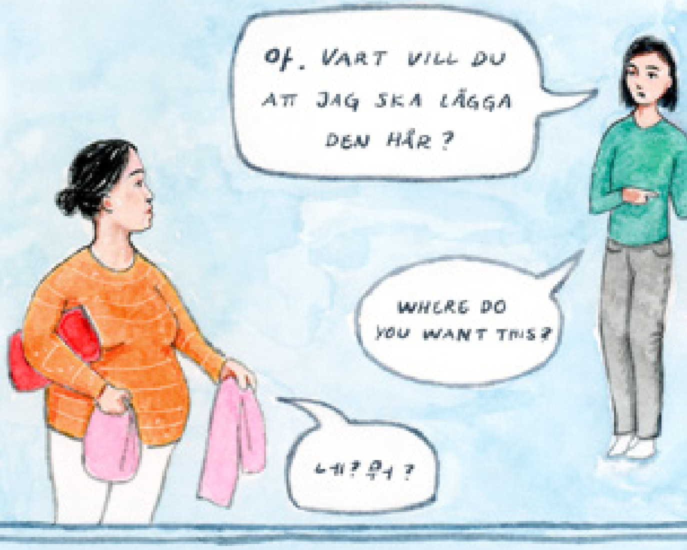
An explanation difficult to believe and digest. But it wasn't the right time to question my family, who I had just met.

What I thought would provide answers, instead just created more questions.

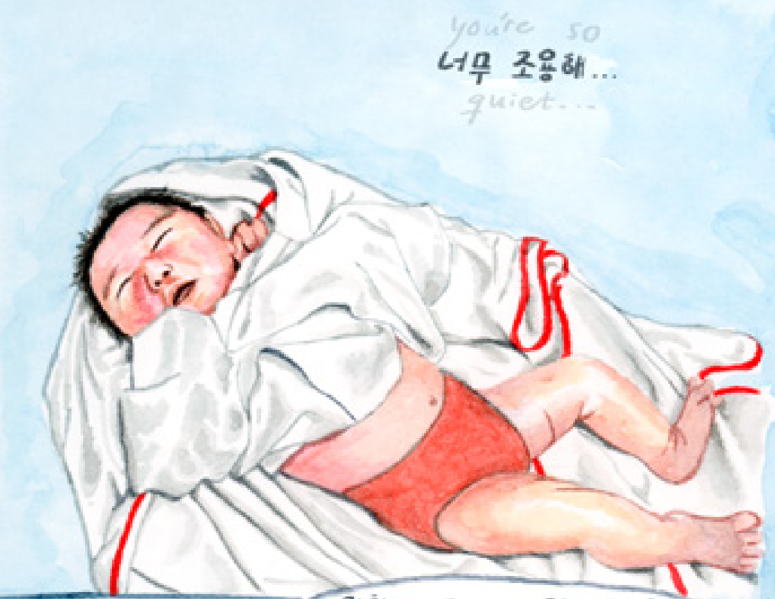
I lived with my sister and her family for almost a month without being able to communicate.

It was frustrating for all of us.
I felt immobile and stressed.

My sister was busy with her children and taking care of the home, whilst being heavily pregnant.

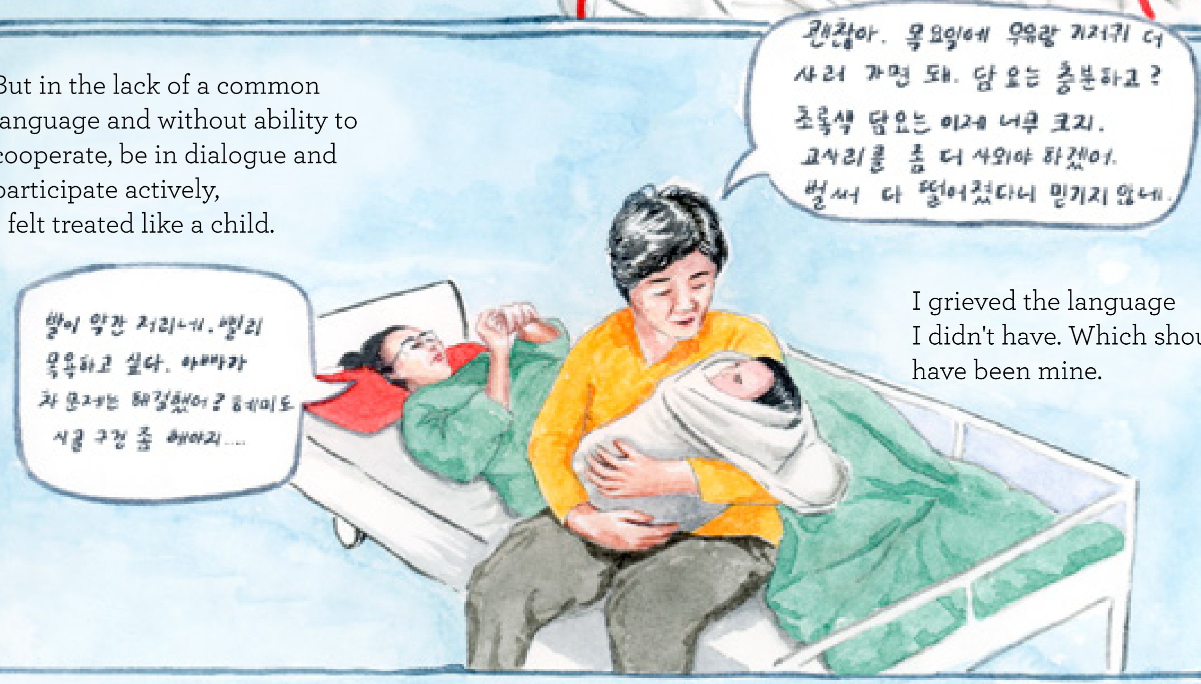

OJ. VART VILL DU ATT JAG SKA LÄGGA DEN HÄR?
WHERE DO YOU WANT THIS?
네? 뭐?

I wanted to tell her I was grateful for welcoming me, even though they were so busy with their own lives.


you're so
너무 조용해...
quiet...

I wanted to talk to her. I wanted to get to know her. I wanted to tell her that I was an adult and share stories about my life.

But in the lack of a common language and without ability to cooperate, be in dialogue and participate actively,
I felt treated like a child.


괜찮아. 목요일에 우유랑 기저귀 더 사러 가면 돼. 담요는 충분하고? 초록색 담요는 이게 너무 크지. 고사리를 좀 더 사와야 하겠어. 벌써 다 떨어졌다니 믿기지 않네.
발이 약간 저리네. 빨리 목욕하고 싶다. 아빠가 차 문제는 해결했어? 하이디도 시골 구경 좀 해야지...

I grieved the language
I didn't have. Which should have been mine.

I said goodbye to my sister, her husband and my parents before taking the train back to Seoul.

My parents were disappointed because I didn't want to stay with them longer. My father was disappointed because I "didn't see them as my parents".

I was disappointed because they didn't seem to want to know anything about me or my Swedish life.

They didn't understand what a difficult journey it was to make alone.

We were all probably relieved to be able to give each other some space and breathe.

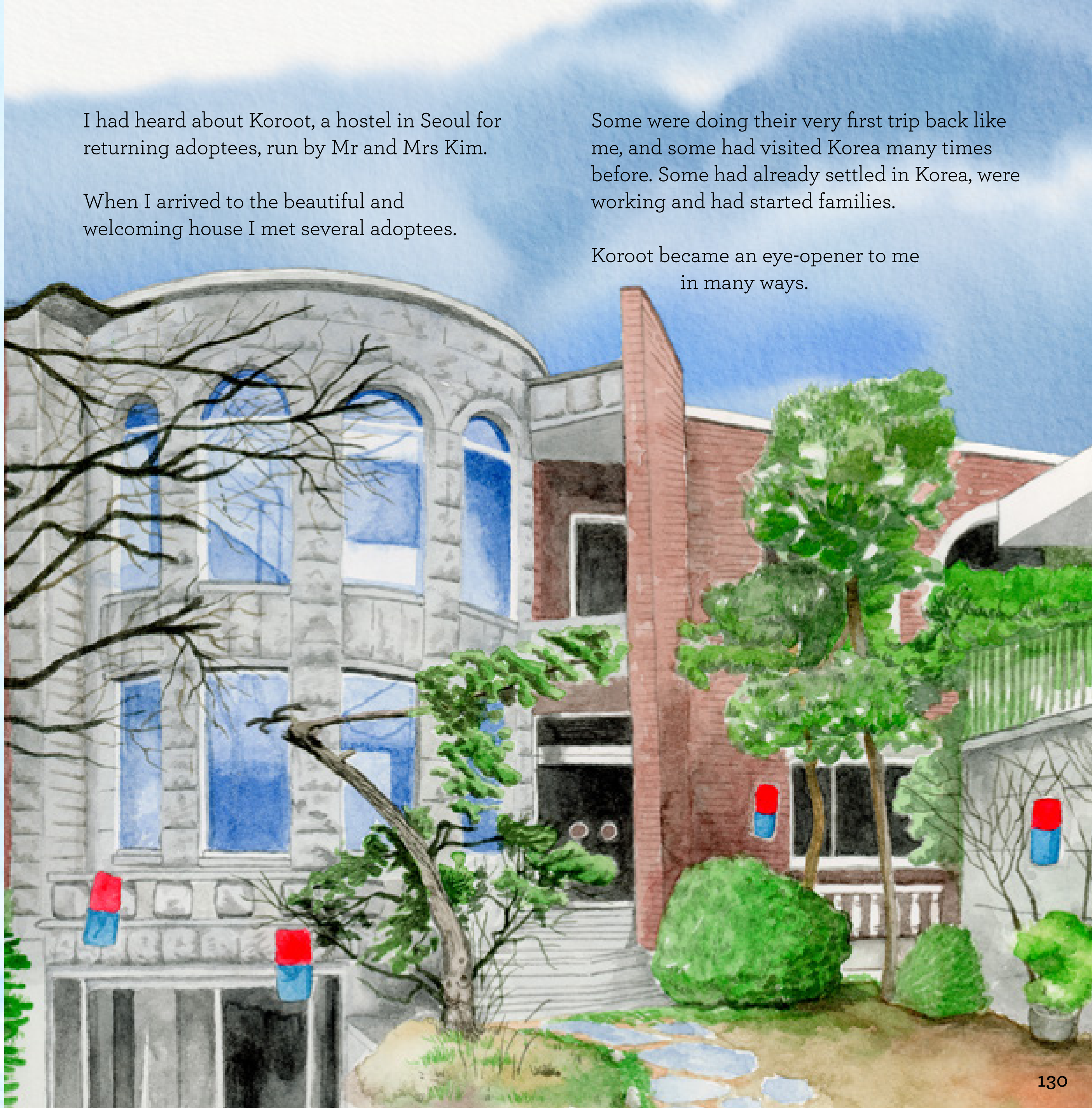
I promised myself that the next time we would meet, I would be able to communicate with them in Korean.

I had heard about Koroot, a hostel in Seoul for returning adoptees, run by Mr and Mrs Kim.

When I arrived to the beautiful and welcoming house I met several adoptees.

Some were doing their very first trip back like me, and some had visited Korea many times before. Some had already settled in Korea, were working and had started families.

Koroot became an eye-opener to me in many ways.



It may sound strange, but I was genuinely shocked. I had naively believed I was unique in returning to Korea to search for my family. Yet, there we were, a whole group of people who had all shared the same longing. And beyond the comforting walls of Koroot, there were many more like us.

When I told my new acquaintances about my adoption background no one was surprised. No one blamed my parents.

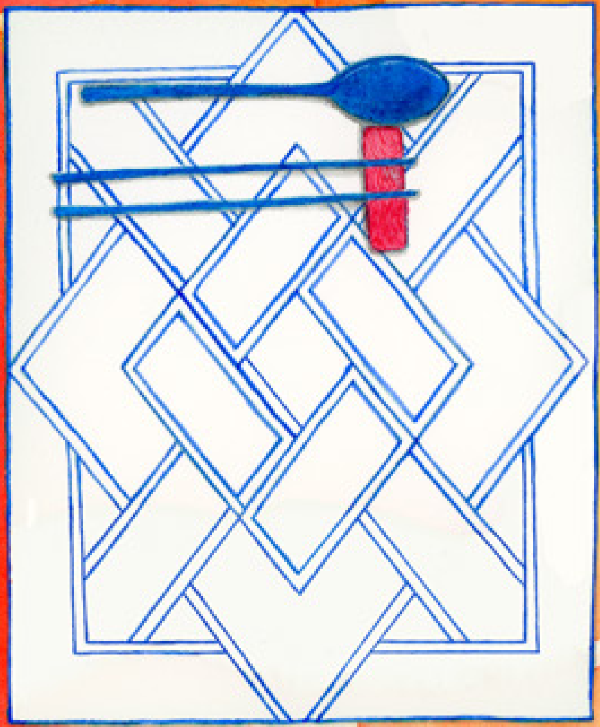
"There's been many unethical and illegal adoptions from Korea. We all know someone with falsified information and pure lies in their adoption files."

The comment made me anxious. But it was probably just an exaggeration, I thought.

For two months, I lived as a tourist in Seoul. I shopped knick-knacks, ate Korean food, visited karaoke rooms and endlessly many bars.

With my new friends we got drunk, laughed and cried while indulging the red, spicy food and the cheap liquor soju.

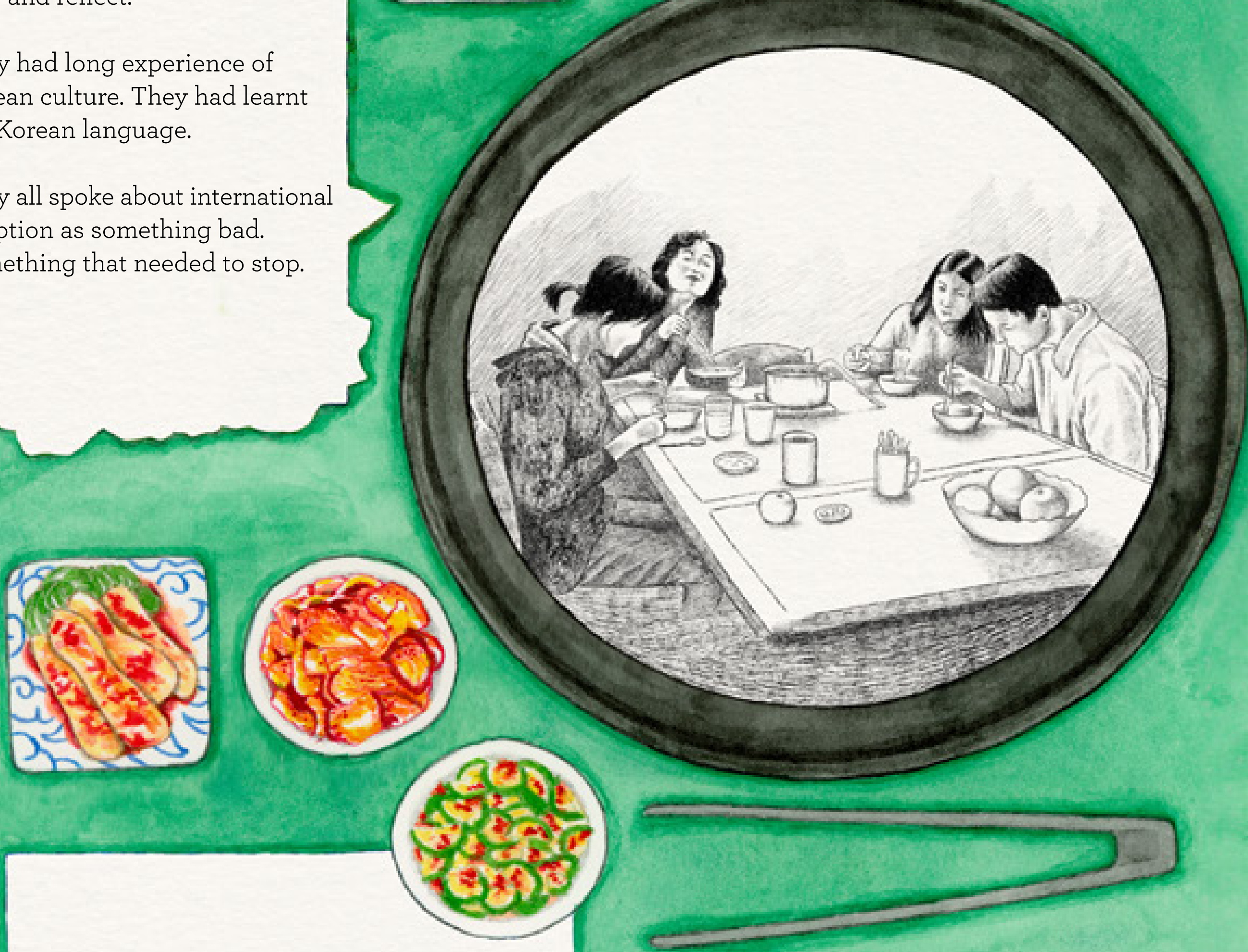
With every bite, I felt myself pulled deeper into the Korean culture.



Among the many adoptees I met, it was a small group of educated, intellectual women who made me stop and reflect.

They had long experience of Korean culture. They had learnt the Korean language.

They all spoke about international adoption as something bad. Something that needed to stop.

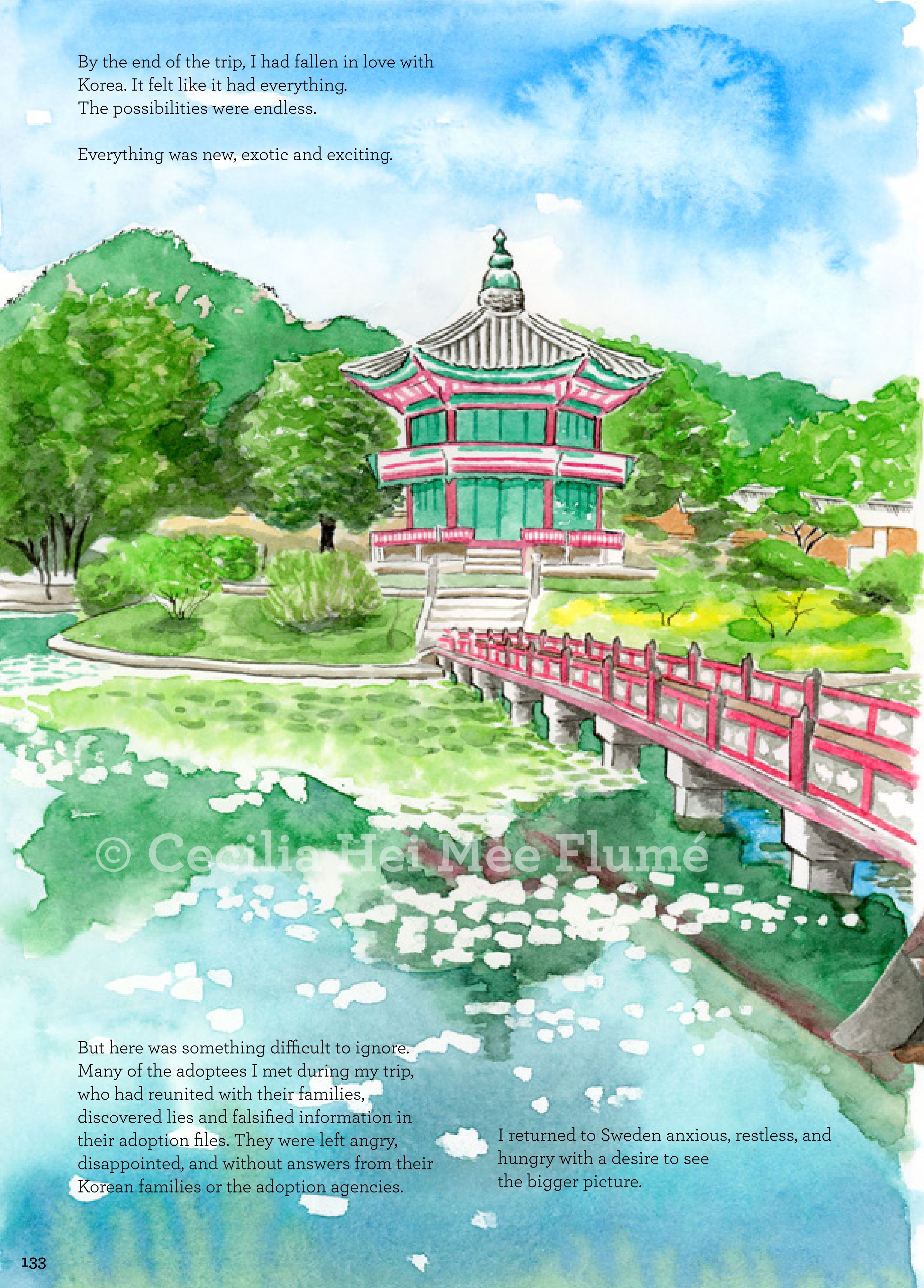


I had been told my whole life that adoption was something beautiful. It was giving a child in need a loving family?

I wasn't sure if I could agree with them. But I sensed they held more pieces of the puzzle than I did.

By the end of the trip, I had fallen in love with Korea. It felt like it had everything. The possibilities were endless.

Everything was new, exotic and exciting.



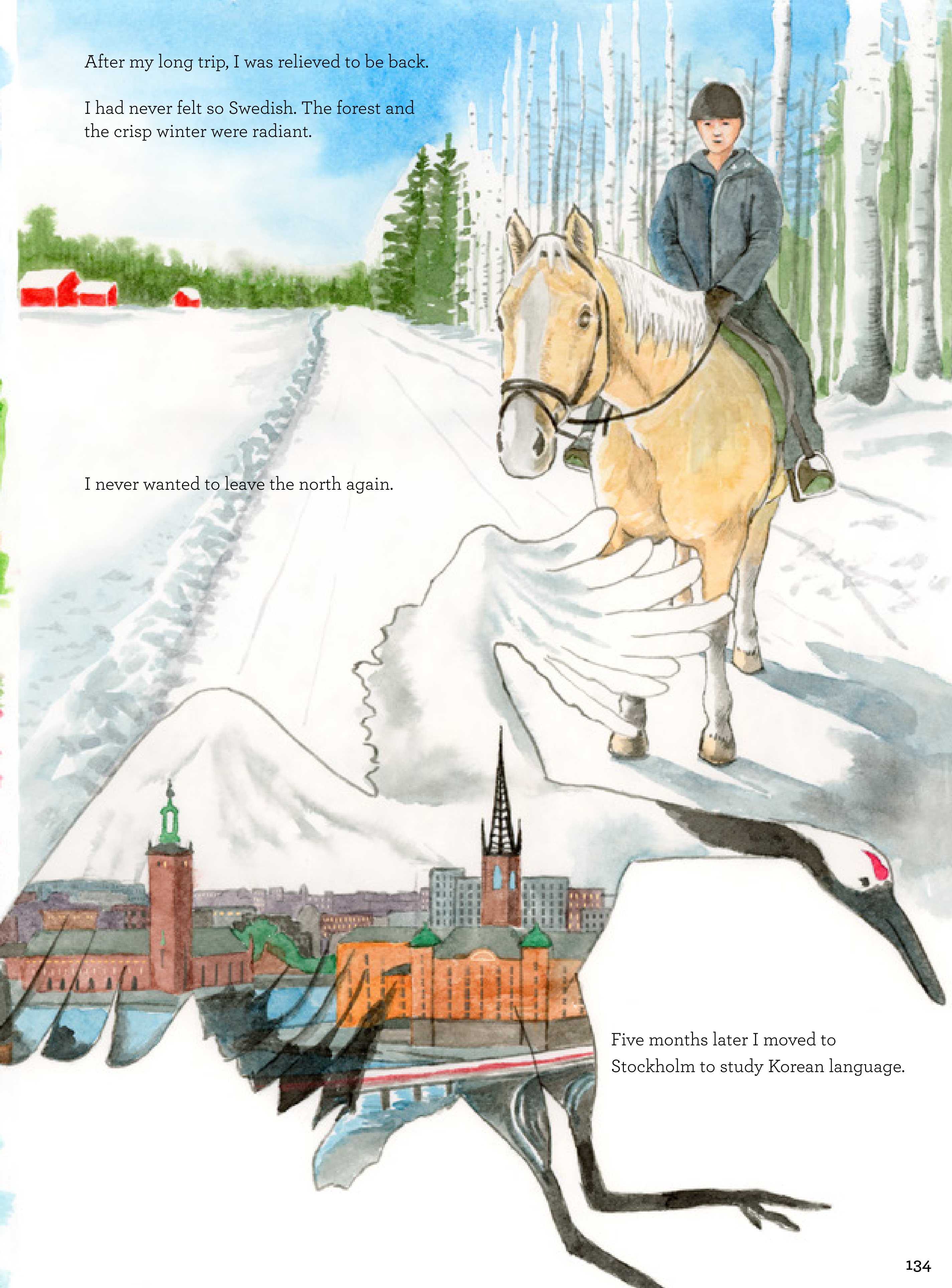
© Cecilia Hei Mee Flumé

But here was something difficult to ignore. Many of the adoptees I met during my trip, who had reunited with their families, discovered lies and falsified information in their adoption files. They were left angry, disappointed, and without answers from their Korean families or the adoption agencies.

I returned to Sweden anxious, restless, and hungry with a desire to see the bigger picture.

After my long trip, I was relieved to be back.

I had never felt so Swedish. The forest and the crisp winter were radiant.

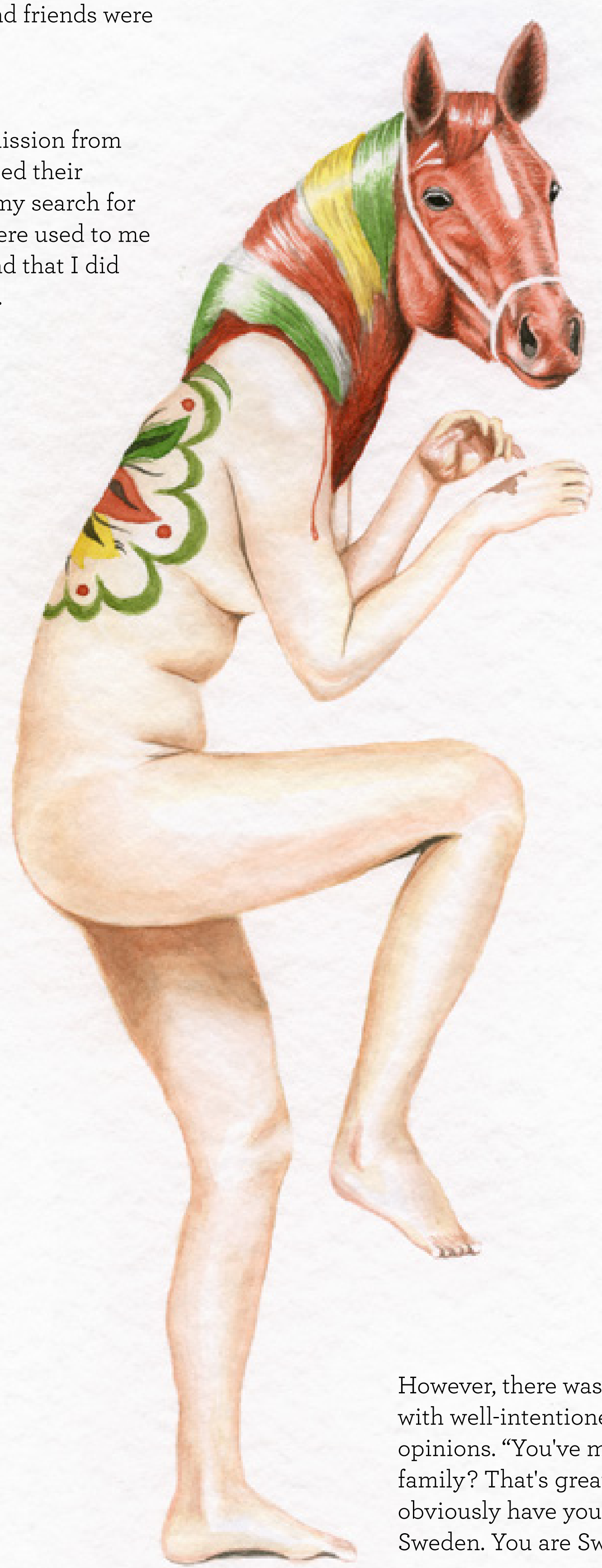


I never wanted to leave the north again.

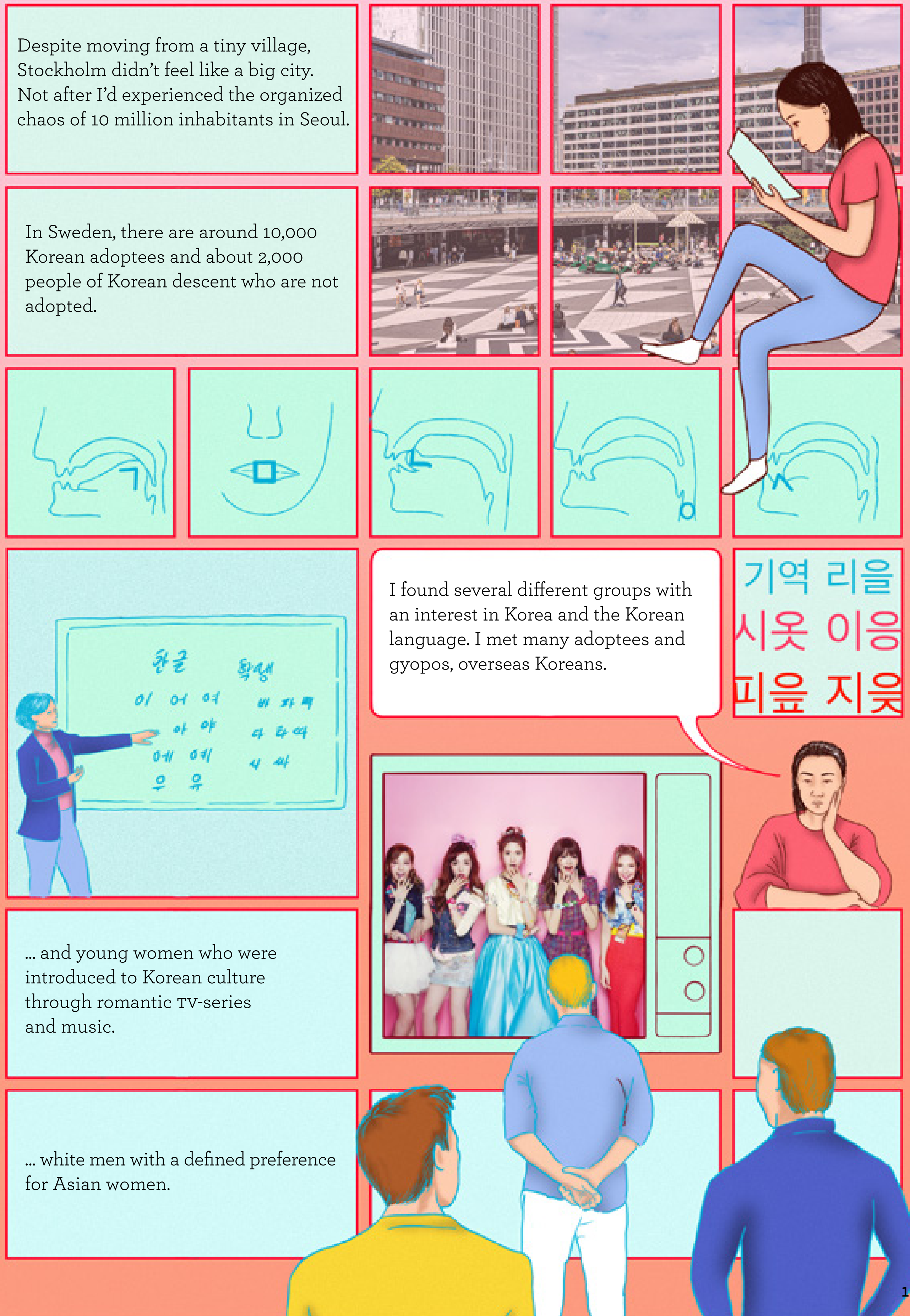
Five months later I moved to Stockholm to study Korean language.

My family, relatives and friends were cheering me on.

I never asked for permission from my parents. I didn't need their acknowledgement in my search for my own roots. They were used to me being independent, and that I did what I wanted anyway.



However, there was always someone with well-intentioned comments and opinions. “You've met your biological family? That's great. But you obviously have your real family in Sweden. You are Swedish after all.”



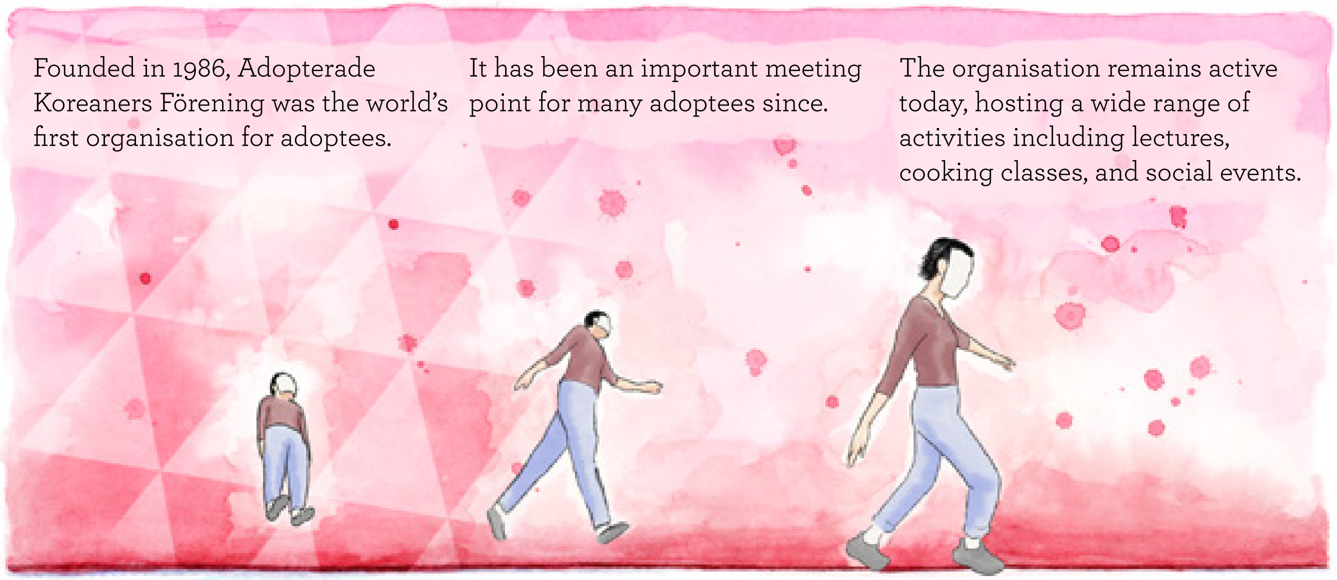
Despite moving from a tiny village, Stockholm didn’t feel like a big city. Not after I’d experienced the organized chaos of 10 million inhabitants in Seoul.

In Sweden, there are around 10,000 Korean adoptees and about 2,000 people of Korean descent who are not adopted.

I found several different groups with an interest in Korea and the Korean language. I met many adoptees and gyopos, overseas Koreans.

... and young women who were introduced to Korean culture through romantic TV-series and music.

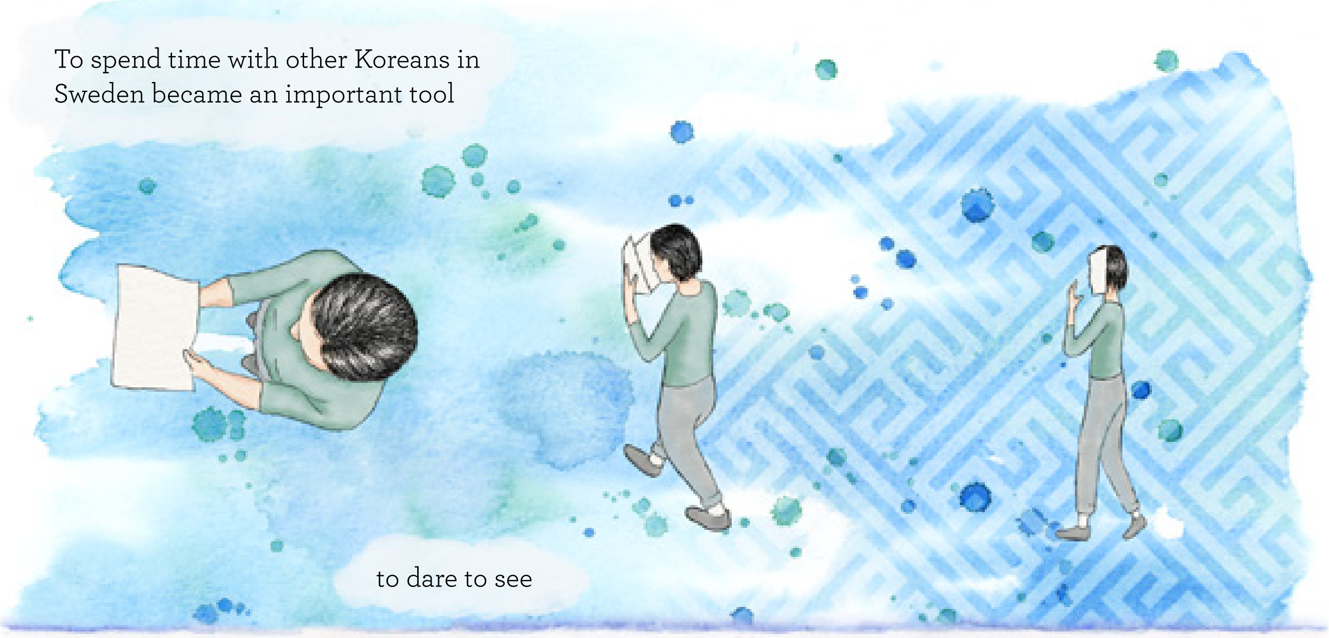
... white men with a defined preference for Asian women.



Founded in 1986, Adopterade Koreaners Förening was the world's first organisation for adoptees.

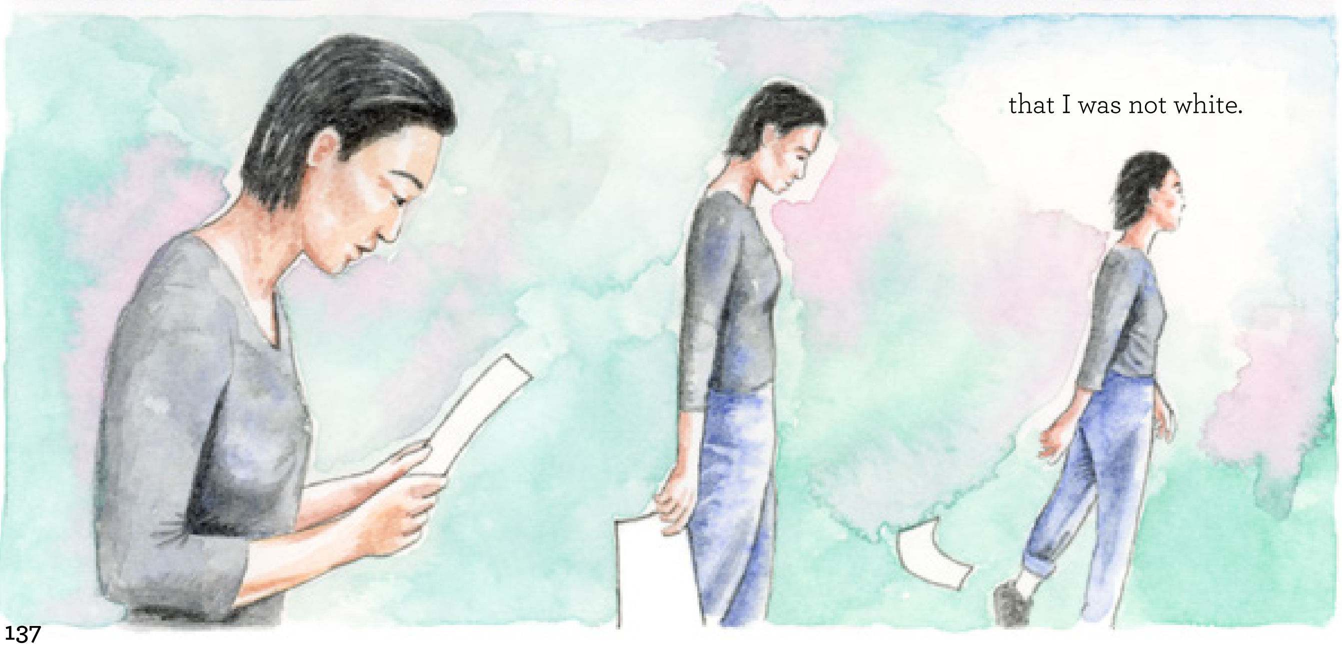
It has been an important meeting point for many adoptees since.

The organisation remains active today, hosting a wide range of activities including lectures, cooking classes, and social events.



To spend time with other Koreans in Sweden became an important tool

to dare to see



that I was not white.

6/11-24 I don't seem like the type to be angry. I've heard that before. but I am ANGRY. All. the. time. always.

fuck Trump.

I am angry with white people
I am angry with MEN
YES ALL OF YOU

I am angry with the Middle class
I HATE it when you whine about your privileges

I AM ANGRY
cross infuriated
enraged FUMING
raging MAD

I am angry with all white men who has an Asian girlfriend
aww that provoke you?

I am angry because I am a woman and so good at sheathing my anger. like WOMEN.

I have written and illustrated a whole book and this page is what you want to critique? What does that say about YOU?

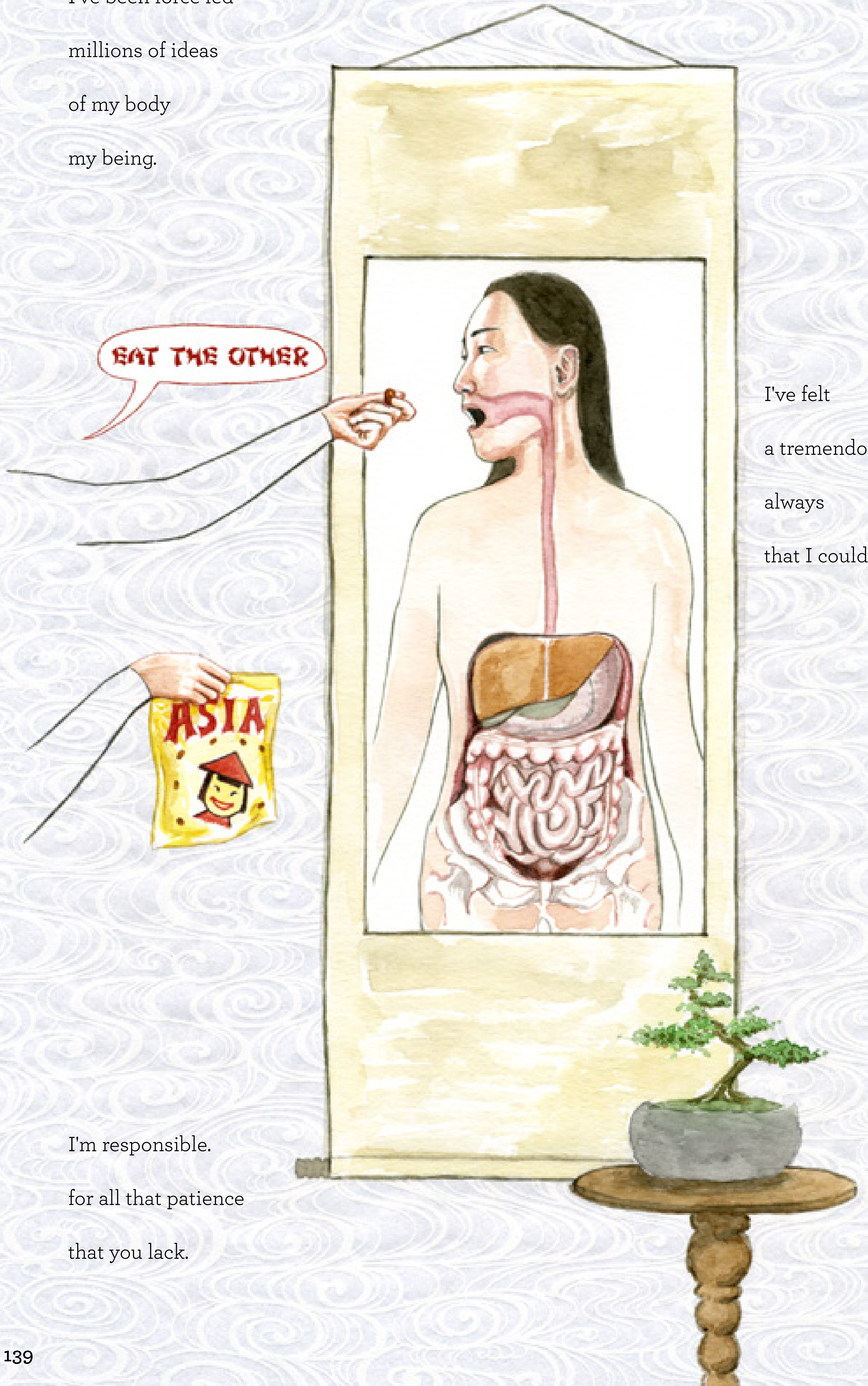
white fragility.

I've been force fed

millions of ideas

of my body

my being.


EAT THE OTHER
ASIA

I've felt

a tremendous rage

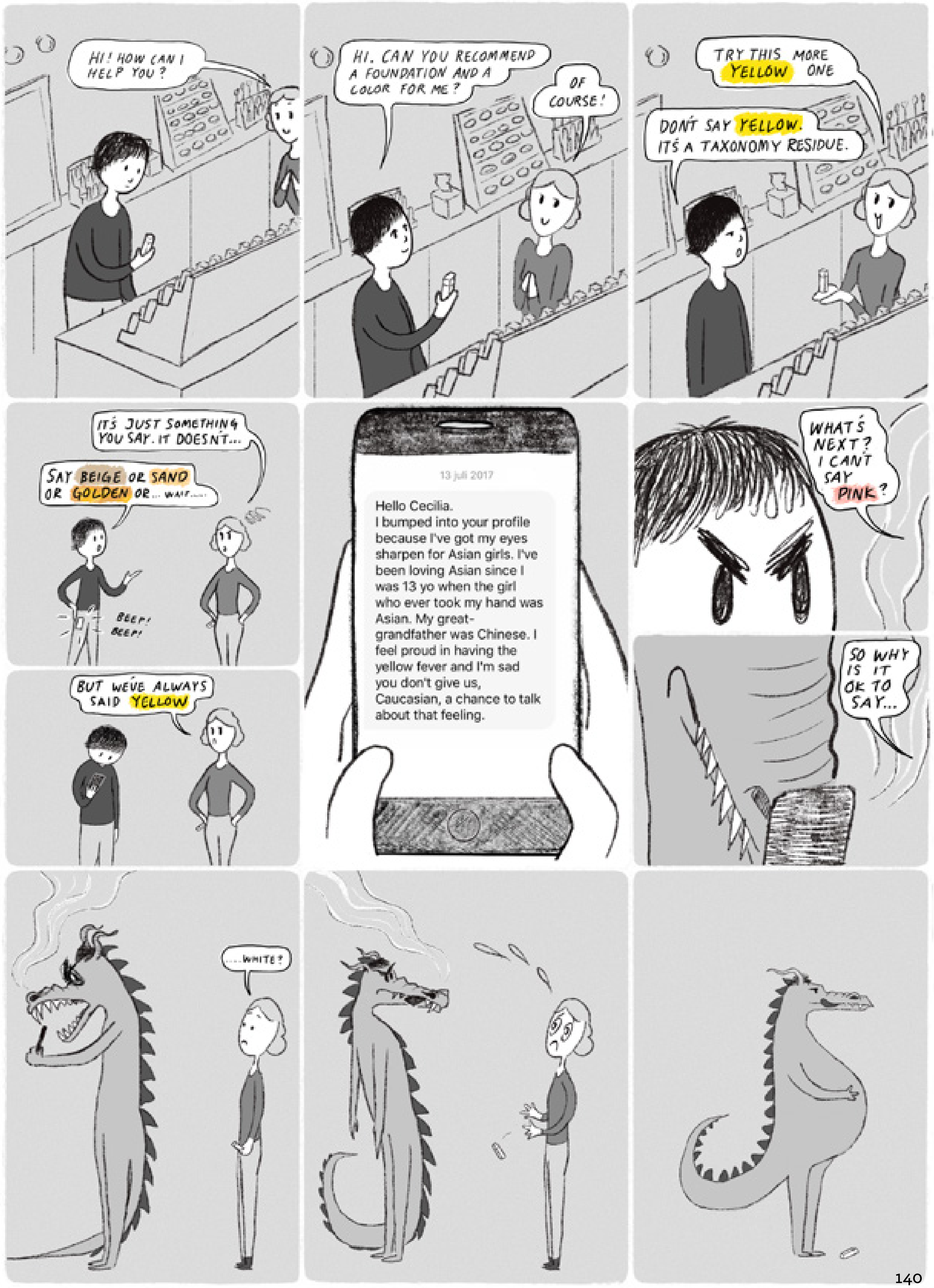
always

that I could never show.

I'm responsible.

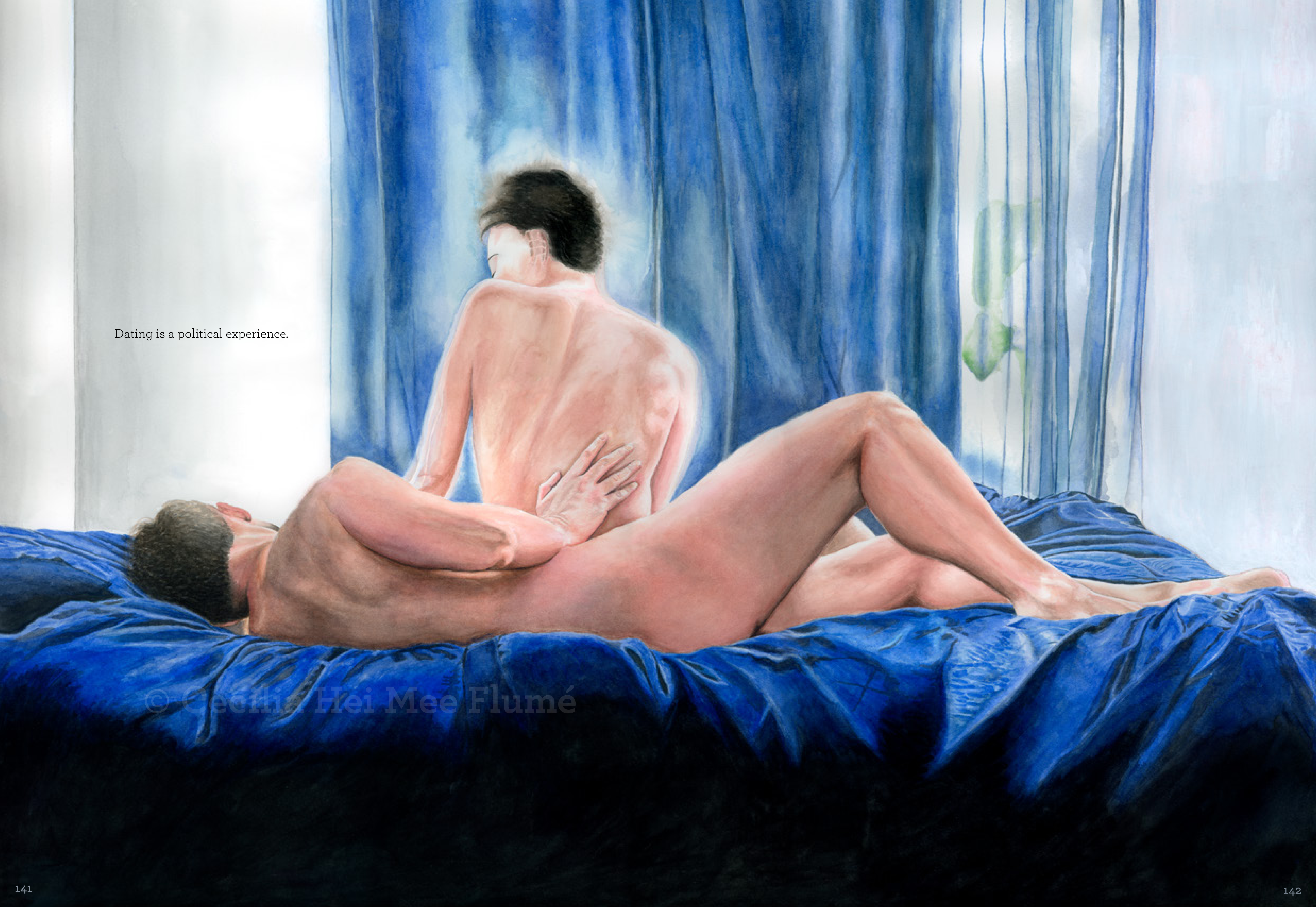
for all that patience

that you lack.


HI! HOW CAN I HELP YOU?
HI. CAN YOU RECOMMEND A FOUNDATION AND A COLOR FOR ME?
OF COURSE!
TRY THIS MORE YELLOW ONE
DON'T SAY YELLOW. IT'S A TAXONOMY RESIDUE.
IT'S JUST SOMETHING YOU SAY. IT DOESN'T...
SAY BEIGE OR SAND OR GOLDEN OR... WAIT....
BEEP! BEEP!
BUT WE'VE ALWAYS SAID YELLOW
WHAT'S NEXT? I CAN'T SAY PINK?
SO WHY IS IT OK TO SAY...
.....WHITE?

13 juli 2017

Hello Cecilia.
I bumped into your profile because I've got my eyes sharpen for Asian girls. I've been loving Asian since I was 13 yo when the girl who ever took my hand was Asian. My great-grandfather was Chinese. I feel proud in having the yellow fever and I'm sad you don't give us, Caucasian, a chance to talk about that feeling.



Dating is a political experience.

© Cecilia Hei Mee Flumé

In addition to the challenging Korean language studies, I studied courses on Korean history and culture. However, no history book cared to disclose much about the total of 200,000 children who were migrated to various parts of the world from South Korea since the 1950s.

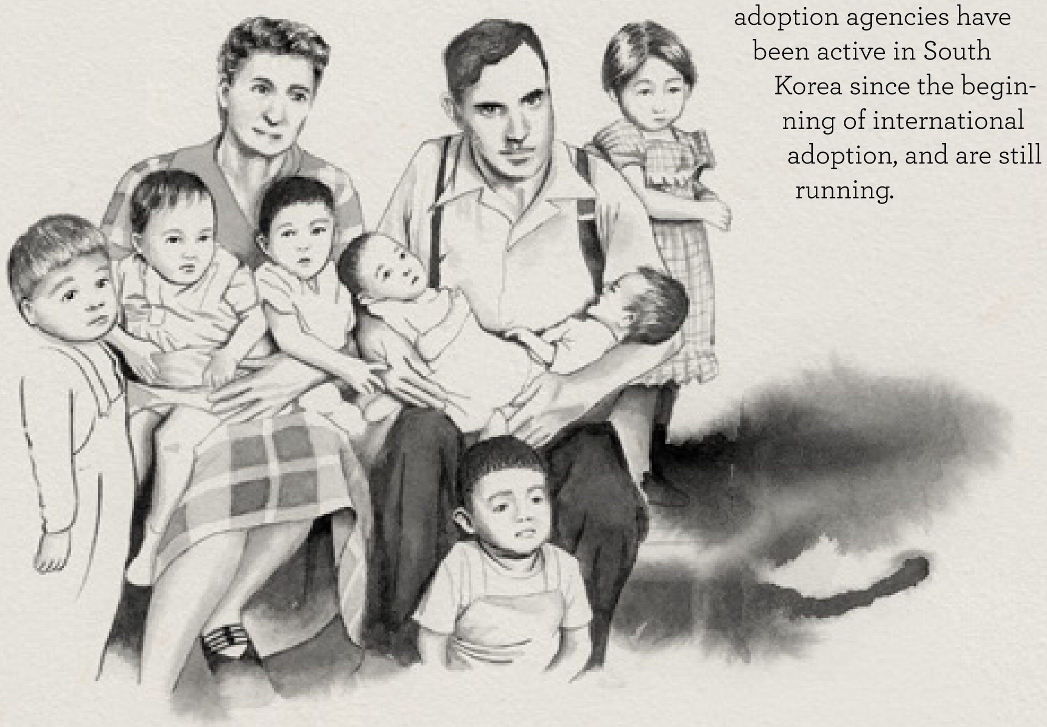
The history books described a struggling and financially burdened nation after the Korean War, with many years of undemocratic rule, coup d'états and aggressive industrialization programs.

During the 50s and 60s, most of the children sent for adoption were orphans of war and broken families. Korean children with American fathers who had served in the military were apprehended to face an exposed and vulnerable life in the ethnically homogeneous Korea. As a result, many were adopted to the United States with the expectation that they would be spared from the harsh stigma associated with their mixed race.

Adoption from South Korea started on a wider scale when the American couple Bertha and Harry Holt adopted eight Korean children in 1955 after the Korean War and brought them to their home in the United States. They then formed the adoption agency Holt International Children's Services, which specialized in bringing children from South Korea to the United States.

In 1964 the adoption agency Korea Social Services opened, and later in 1972, Eastern Social welfare Society.

In the 60s, the Social Welfare Society, SWS, began to send children from South Korea to Sweden. The majority of Swedish Korean adoptees have come to Sweden through this agency. These four adoption agencies have been active in South Korea since the beginning of international adoption, and are still running.



The development of South Korea's economy after the war is often referred to as a miracle. South Korea went from being one of the world's poorest countries to one of the world's richest in just one generation.

Korea was still undemocratic and politically unruly in the 80's but with a significantly better material standard than before. Orphaned, poor children who were sent abroad became fewer and children from unwed mothers became more common.

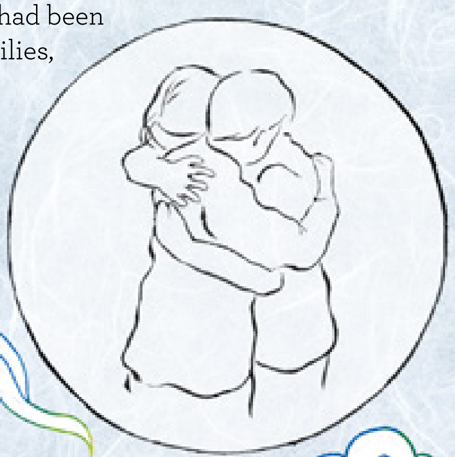
In 1988, Korea hosted the Olympic Games and were ready to show the world its hard working spirit and modernised society.

Korea was no longer a developing country, though paradoxically, it was between 1984 and 1988 that Korea sent away the highest number of children for adoption, between 6,000 and 9,000 per year. In 1985, that meant 24 children per day.

Korea showed no interest in talking about the babies they sent overseas.

눈에 밟힌다.

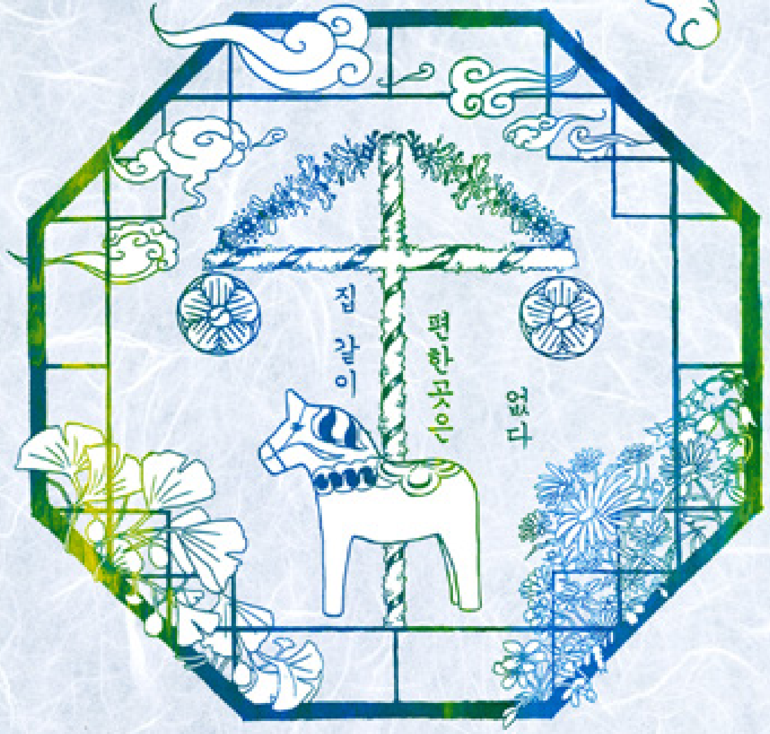
But in Sweden, every now and then, I would come across a newspaper or TV report about adoptees who had been reunited with their first families, on their own or through dramatic reality shows.



The narrative was always the same.

The adoptee was curious, had longed, wondered about their origins and their family. Then they were reunited with their mother or maybe a sibling.

By the end however, it would always be declared by the adoptee, that they are Swedish. "Sweden is where I belong after all."

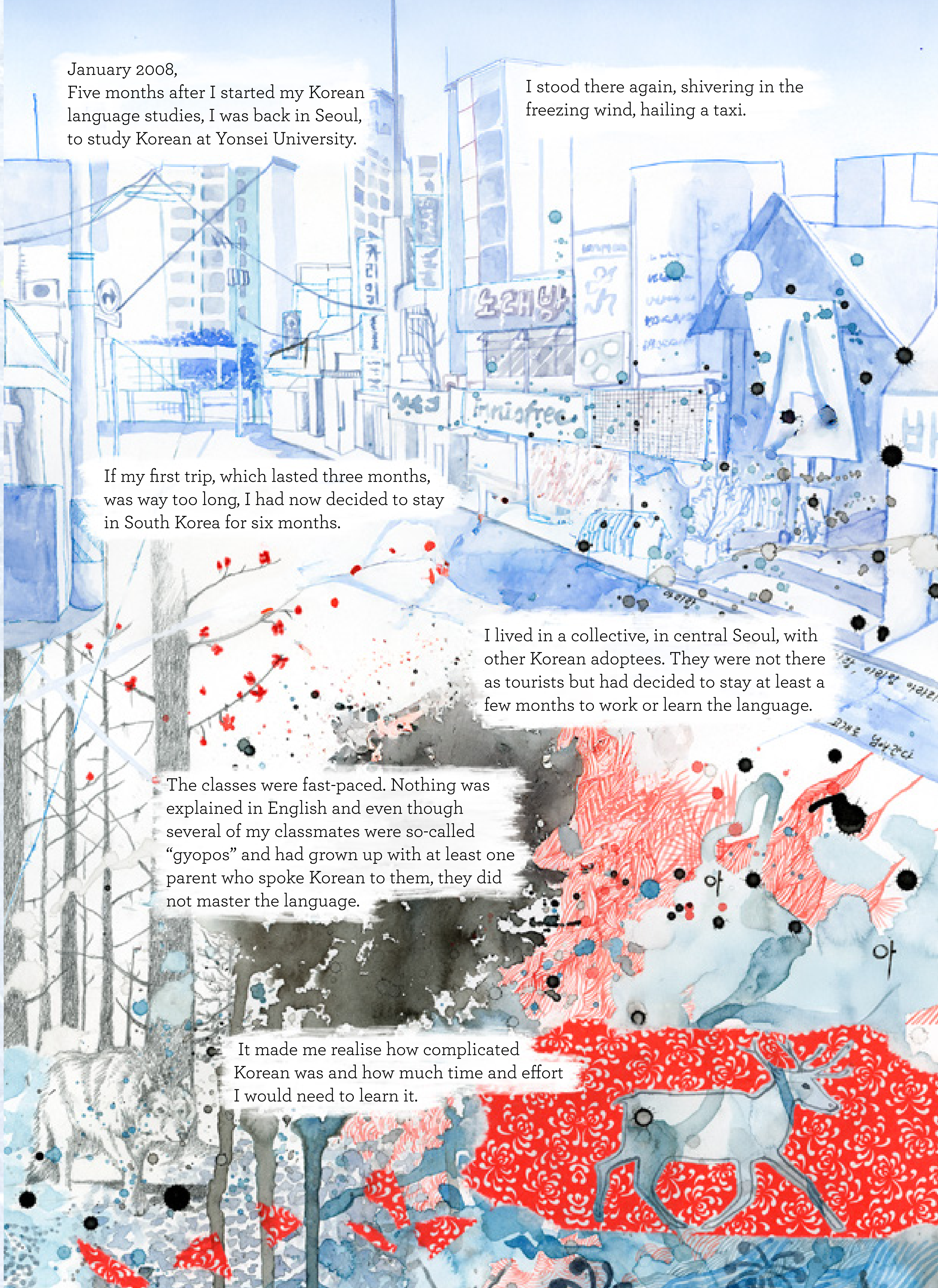


Like a reflex,

as if my Swedish ethnicity would dissolve in a matter of seconds, because I want to know the culture and the country where I was born.

Like I can't choose
which identities
I want to be...

...is to be conditioned.



January 2008,
Five months after I started my Korean language studies, I was back in Seoul, to study Korean at Yonsei University.

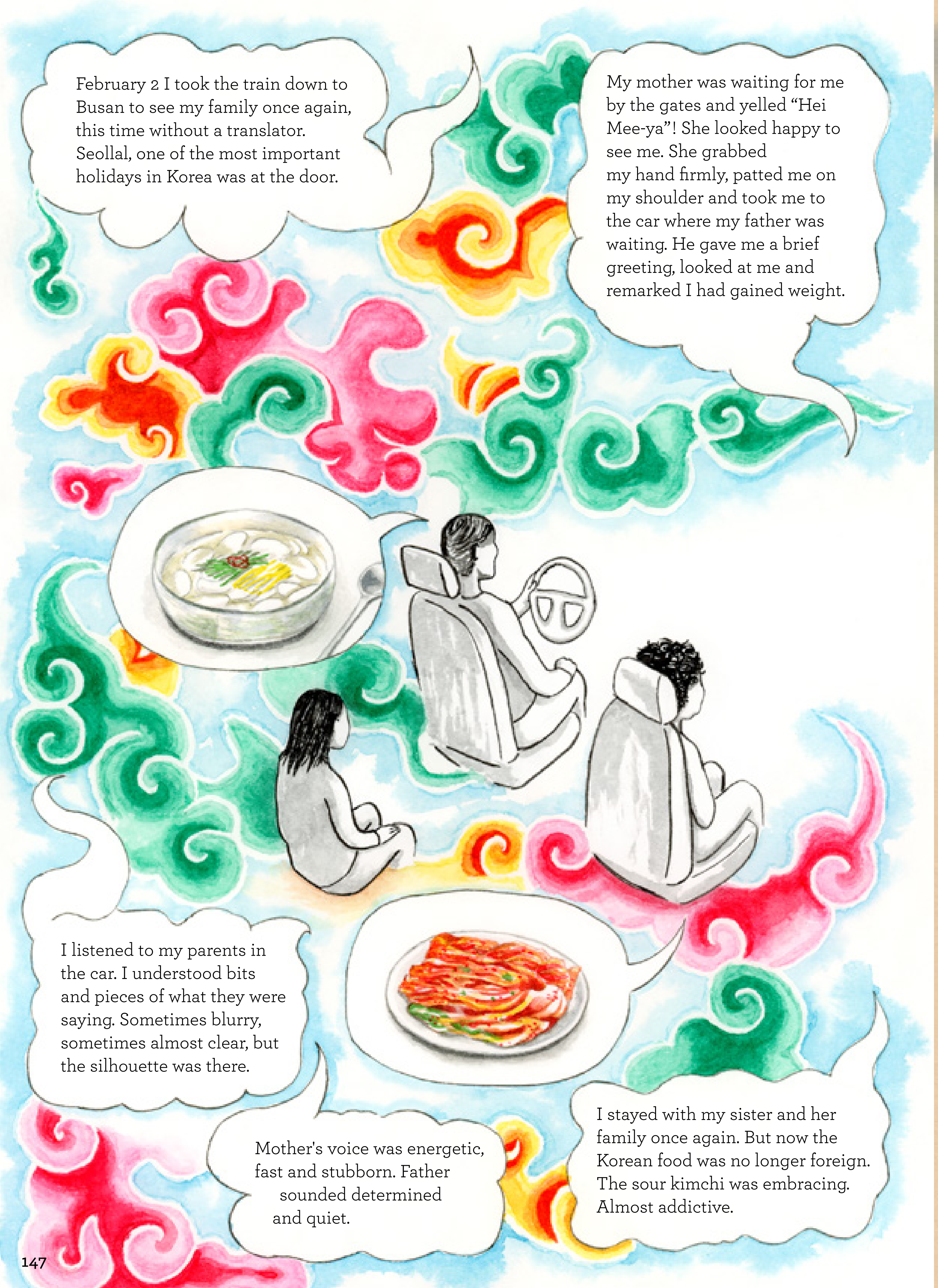
I stood there again, shivering in the freezing wind, hailing a taxi.

If my first trip, which lasted three months, was way too long, I had now decided to stay in South Korea for six months.

I lived in a collective, in central Seoul, with other Korean adoptees. They were not there as tourists but had decided to stay at least a few months to work or learn the language.

The classes were fast-paced. Nothing was explained in English and even though several of my classmates were so-called "gyopos" and had grown up with at least one parent who spoke Korean to them, they did not master the language.

It made me realise how complicated Korean was and how much time and effort I would need to learn it.



February 2 I took the train down to Busan to see my family once again, this time without a translator. Seollal, one of the most important holidays in Korea was at the door.

My mother was waiting for me by the gates and yelled "Hei Mee-ya"! She looked happy to see me. She grabbed my hand firmly, patted me on my shoulder and took me to the car where my father was waiting. He gave me a brief greeting, looked at me and remarked I had gained weight.

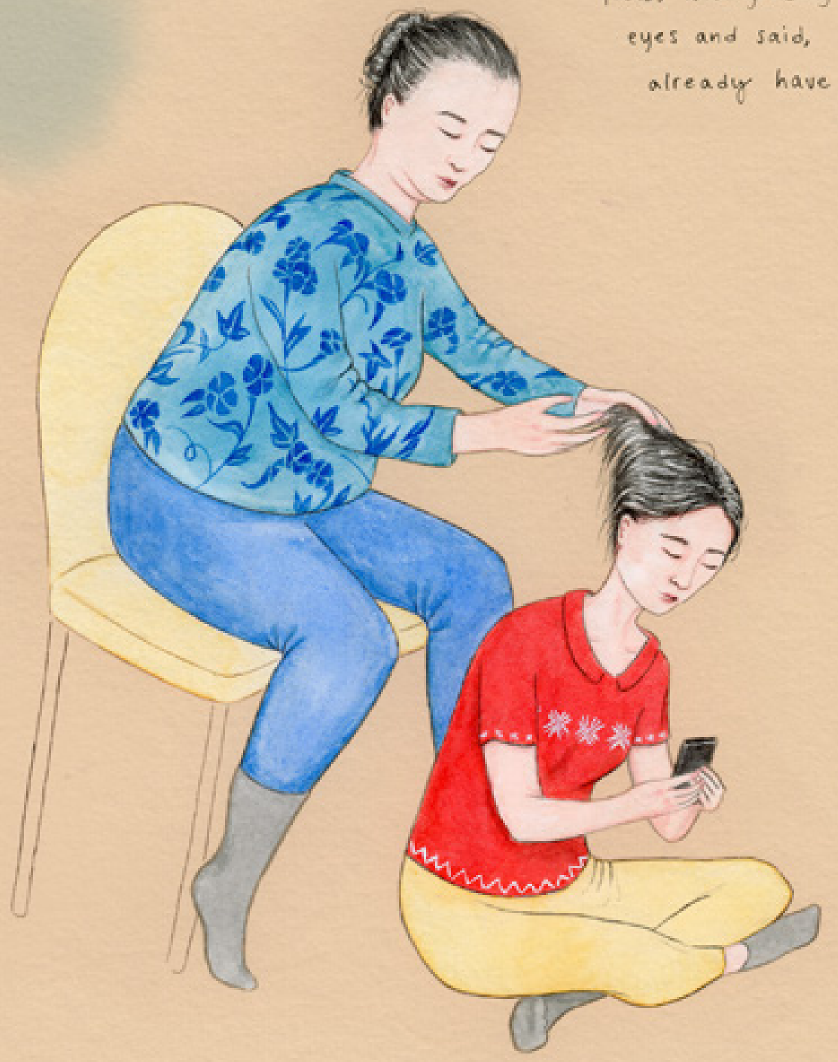
I listened to my parents in the car. I understood bits and pieces of what they were saying. Sometimes blurry, sometimes almost clear, but the silhouette was there.

Mother's voice was energetic, fast and stubborn. Father sounded determined and quiet.

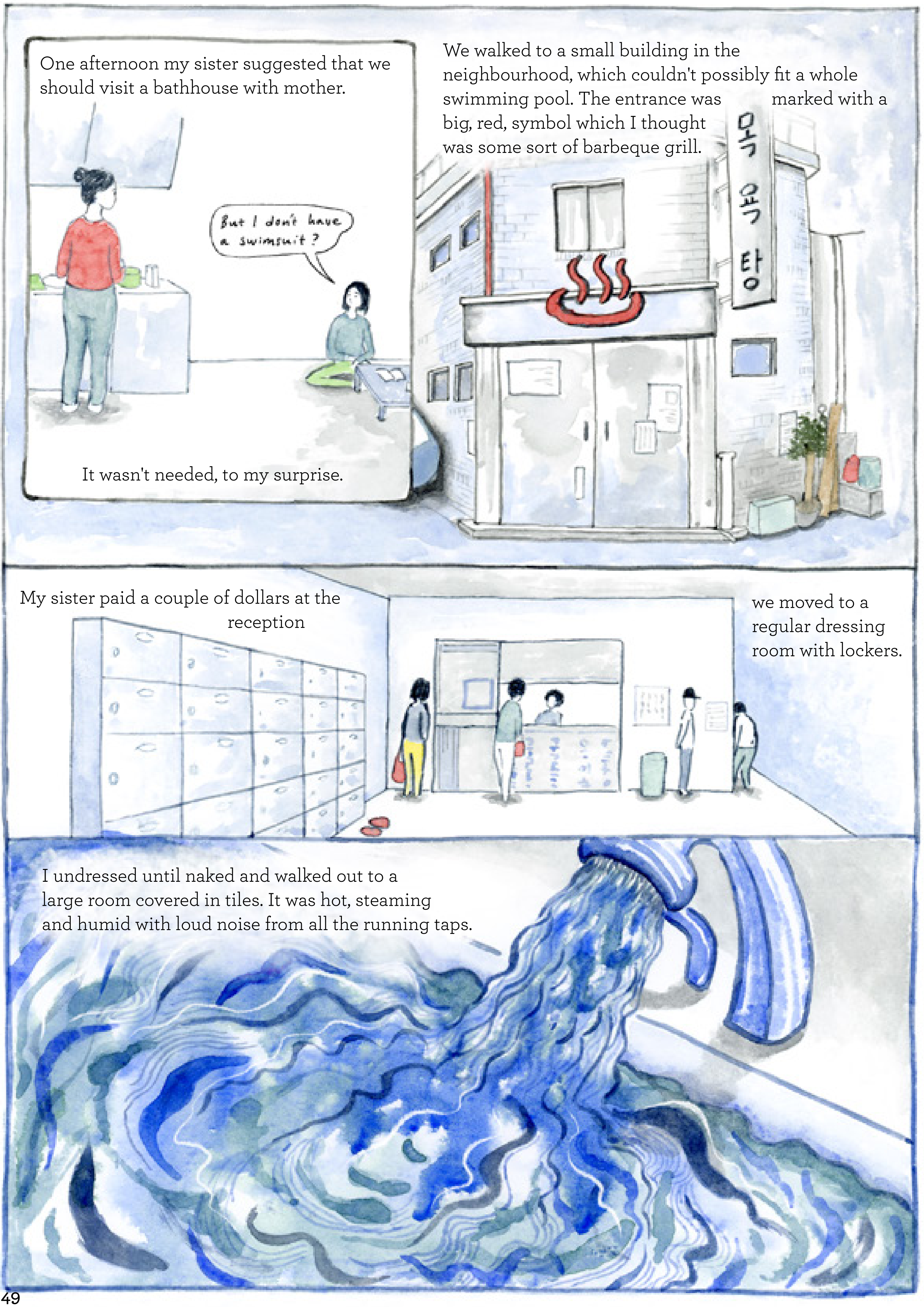
I stayed with my sister and her family once again. But now the Korean food was no longer foreign. The sour kimchi was embracing. Almost addictive.

My sister, onni as it's called in Korean, wanted me to wear more makeup and dress in cute Korean clothes. She wanted me to move to Korea, marry a Korean man and learn enough Korean language so we could talk to each other uninterruptedly like sisters do.

When I showed her images of the Swedish home where I grew up, the forest and green fields with grazing horses she lowered her eyes and said, "But I understand you already have a different life."



To them I was raised in a castle. I had access to free university and free health care. A life in luxury.



One afternoon my sister suggested that we should visit a bathhouse with mother.

But I don't have a swimsuit?

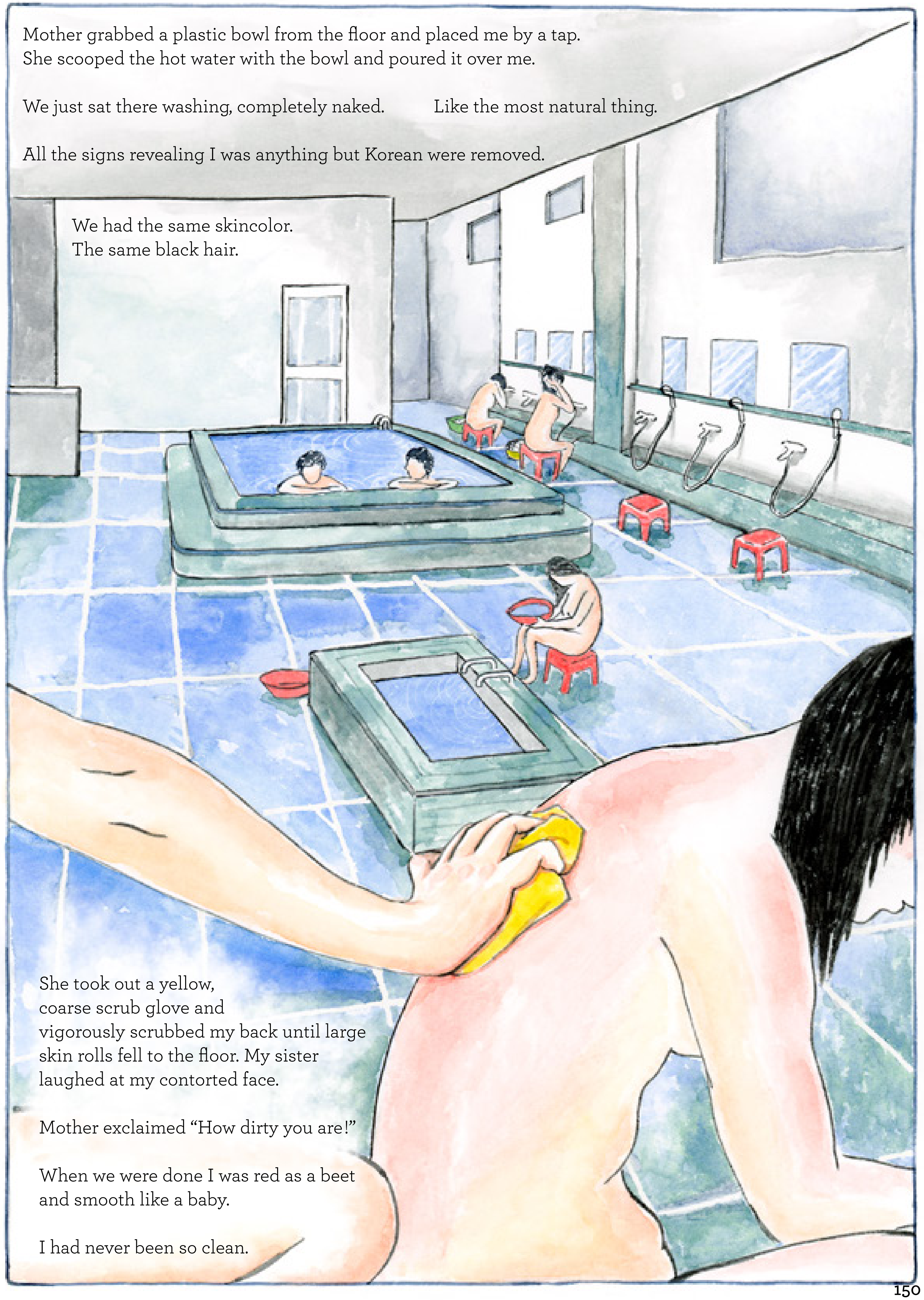
It wasn't needed, to my surprise.

We walked to a small building in the neighbourhood, which couldn't possibly fit a whole swimming pool. The entrance was marked with a big, red, symbol which I thought was some sort of barbeque grill.

My sister paid a couple of dollars at the reception

we moved to a regular dressing room with lockers.

I undressed until naked and walked out to a large room covered in tiles. It was hot, steaming and humid with loud noise from all the running taps.



Mother grabbed a plastic bowl from the floor and placed me by a tap.
She scooped the hot water with the bowl and poured it over me.

We just sat there washing, completely naked. Like the most natural thing.

All the signs revealing I was anything but Korean were removed.

We had the same skincolor.
The same black hair.

She took out a yellow, coarse scrub glove and vigorously scrubbed my back until large skin rolls fell to the floor. My sister laughed at my contorted face.

Mother exclaimed “How dirty you are!”

When we were done I was red as a beet and smooth like a baby.

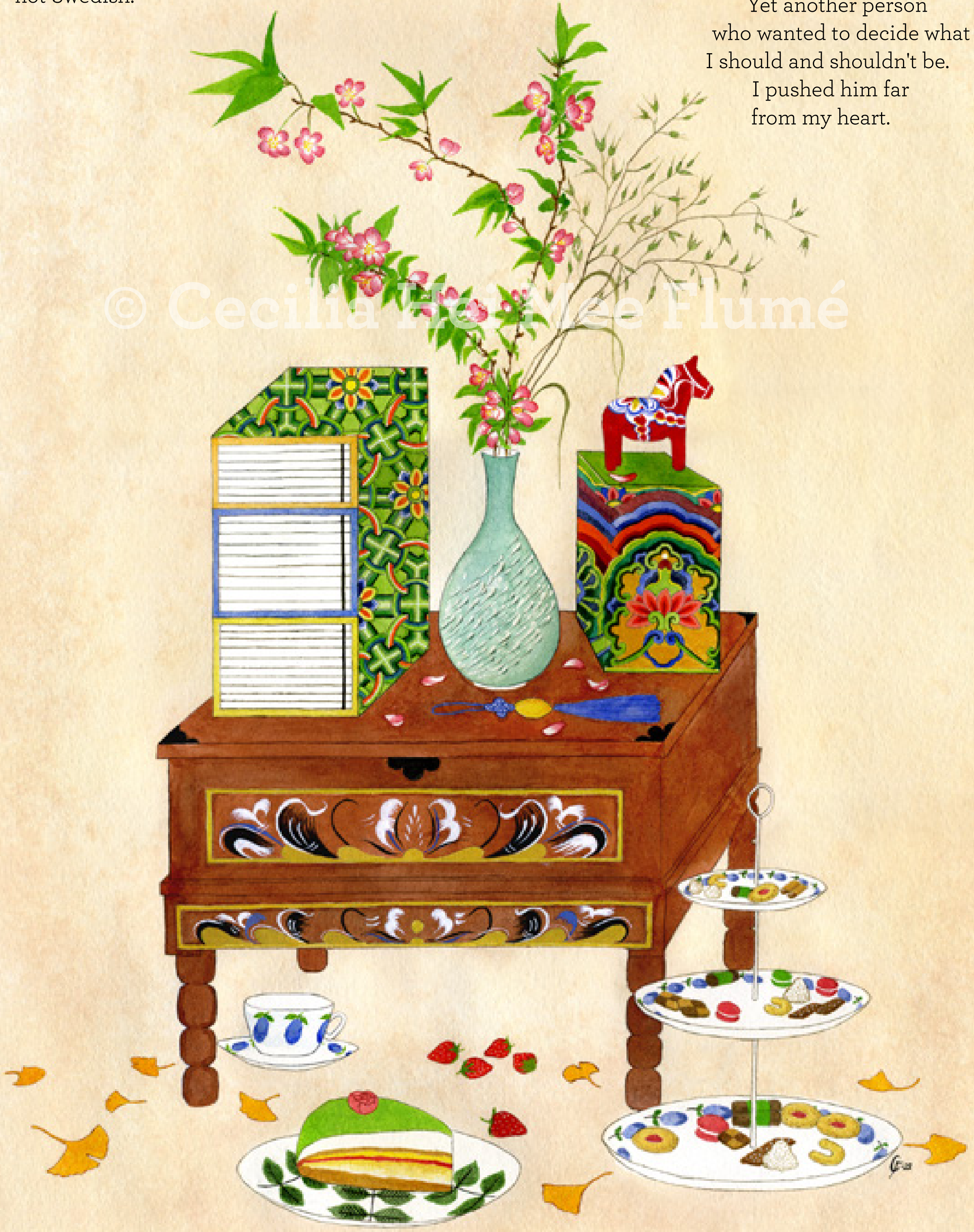
I had never been so clean.

During one dinner
my father tells me urgingly

"You should know
you are Korean,
not Swedish."

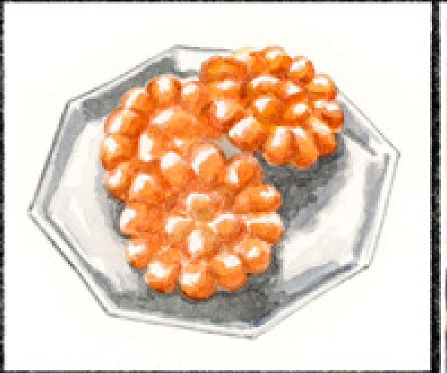
Deep inside I knew what he meant.
But it was like the straw that
broke the camel's back.

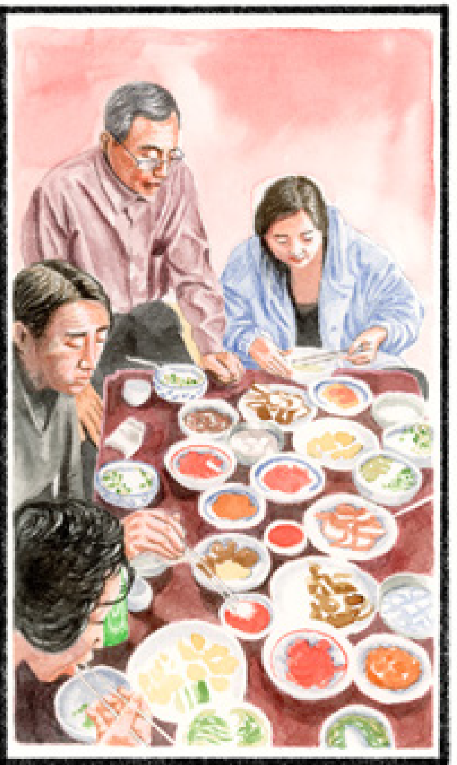
Yet another person
who wanted to decide what
I should and shouldn't be.
I pushed him far
from my heart.

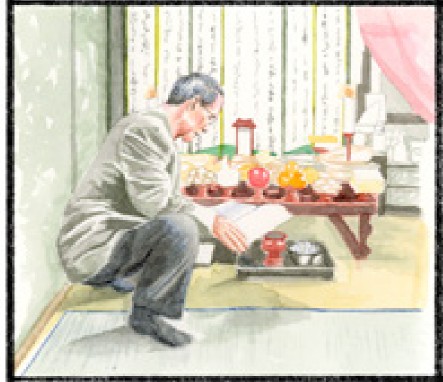


© Cecilia HeiMee Flumé

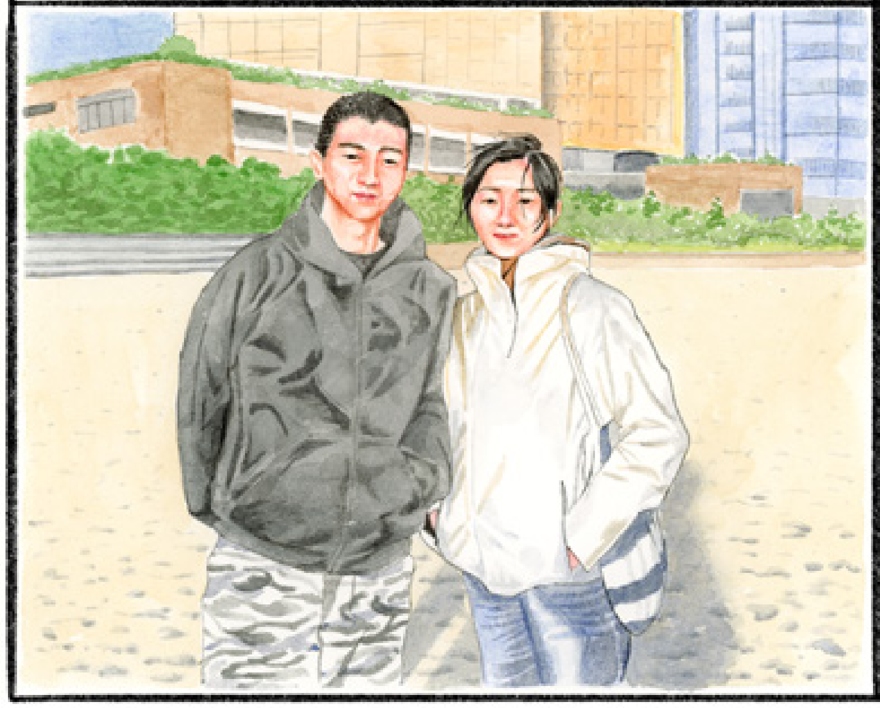
The Lunar New Year celebration was intense. After a couple of days without any sleep I was exhausted. I met my brother again and a couple of relatives. We sat around the dinner table and my name was mentioned several times without me understanding what they were talking about.







In the evening, me, my cousin and my brother went to a neighborhood bar to drink soju. My brother was very shy and careful. He would barely look me in my eyes when he asked if I wanted to eat hamburgers, or maybe pizza.

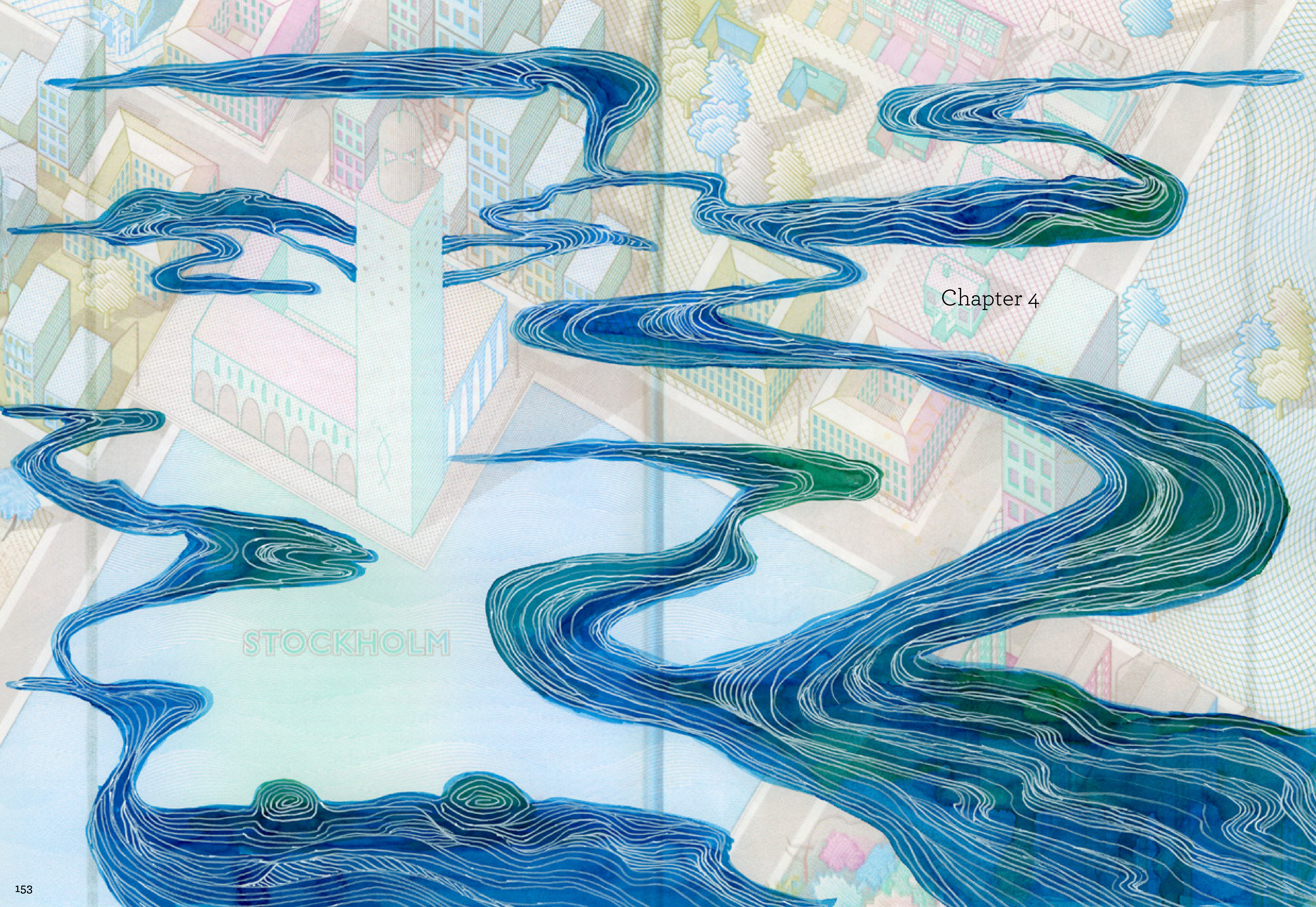


My Onni told me he always wanted a younger sister. Now suddenly he got an alien sister. One he couldn't communicate with.

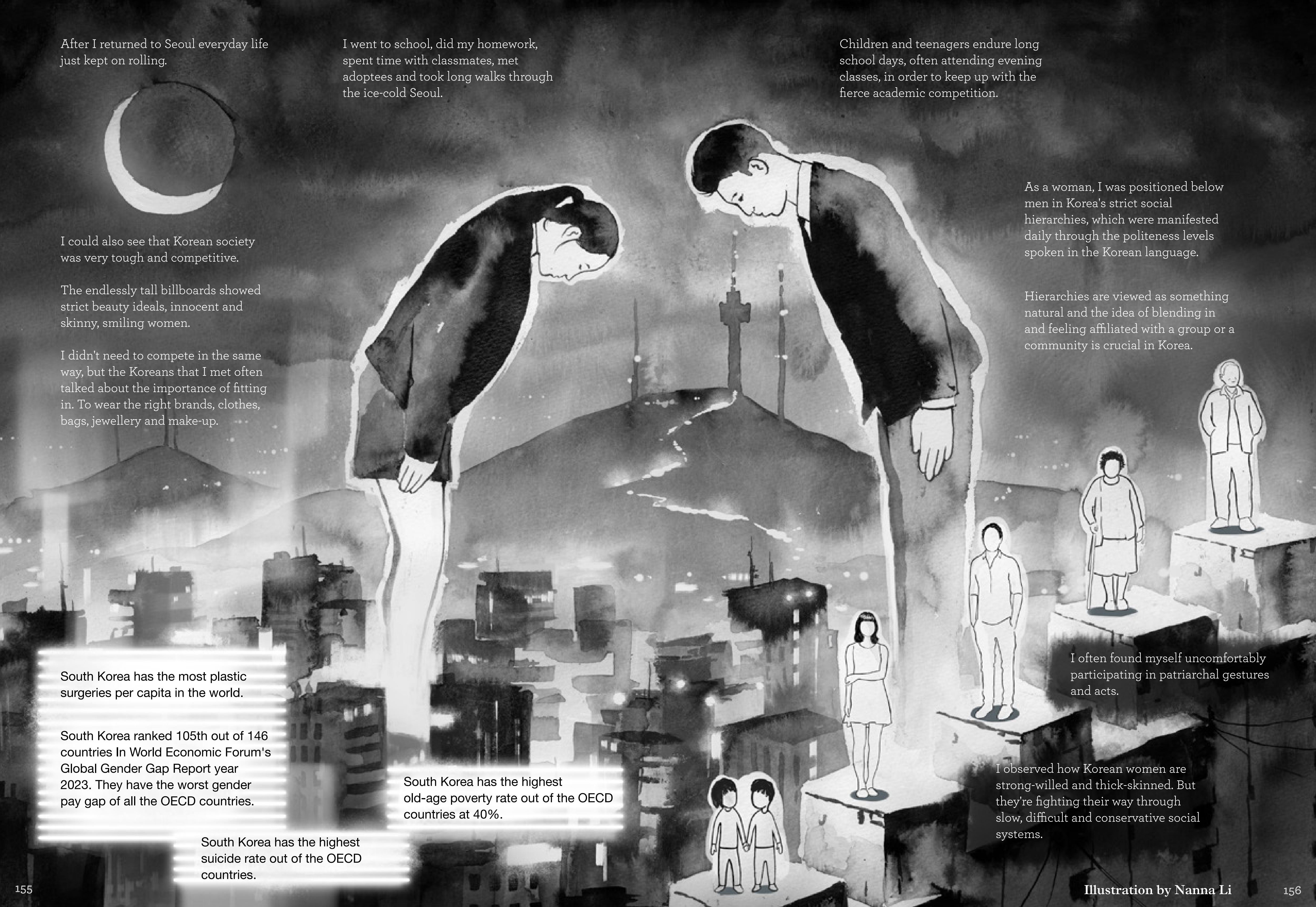
Slowly I thought

maybe

we looked a little bit alike.



Chapter 4



After I returned to Seoul everyday life just kept on rolling.

I went to school, did my homework, spent time with classmates, met adoptees and took long walks through the ice-cold Seoul.

I could also see that Korean society was very tough and competitive.

The endlessly tall billboards showed strict beauty ideals, innocent and skinny, smiling women.

I didn't need to compete in the same way, but the Koreans that I met often talked about the importance of fitting in. To wear the right brands, clothes, bags, jewellery and make-up.

South Korea has the most plastic surgeries per capita in the world.

South Korea ranked 105th out of 146 countries In World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report year 2023. They have the worst gender pay gap of all the OECD countries.

South Korea has the highest old-age poverty rate out of the OECD countries at 40%.

South Korea has the highest suicide rate out of the OECD countries.

Children and teenagers endure long school days, often attending evening classes, in order to keep up with the fierce academic competition.

As a woman, I was positioned below men in Korea's strict social hierarchies, which were manifested daily through the politeness levels spoken in the Korean language.

Hierarchies are viewed as something natural and the idea of blending in and feeling affiliated with a group or a community is crucial in Korea.

I often found myself uncomfortably participating in patriarchal gestures and acts.

I observed how Korean women are strong-willed and thick-skinned. But they're fighting their way through slow, difficult and conservative social systems.

Illustration by Nanna Li

How did I end up here, at the other side of the world, if poverty wasn't actually the main reason for why babies were sent overseas from Korea?

On the 11th of May, 2012, I was in Seoul's National Assembly building to listen to a group of unwed mothers talk about their activism. Several Korean adoptees also participated, adding their voices to the conversation.

The previous year, a group of Korean women and adoptees had inaugurated Single Mother's Day, to be held annually on May 11. This event was created to address the underlying issues that prevent women in Korea from keeping their own children.

The unwed mothers recounted how, after giving birth out of wedlock, they faced overwhelming pressure and a complete lack of support from family and friends. Many were forced to consider giving up their children for adoption out of sheer desperation.

However, none of them wanted to be separated from their children.

They chose to keep their children but also faced extreme social stigma. They could no longer get jobs, their friends abandoned them, and were disowned by their families.

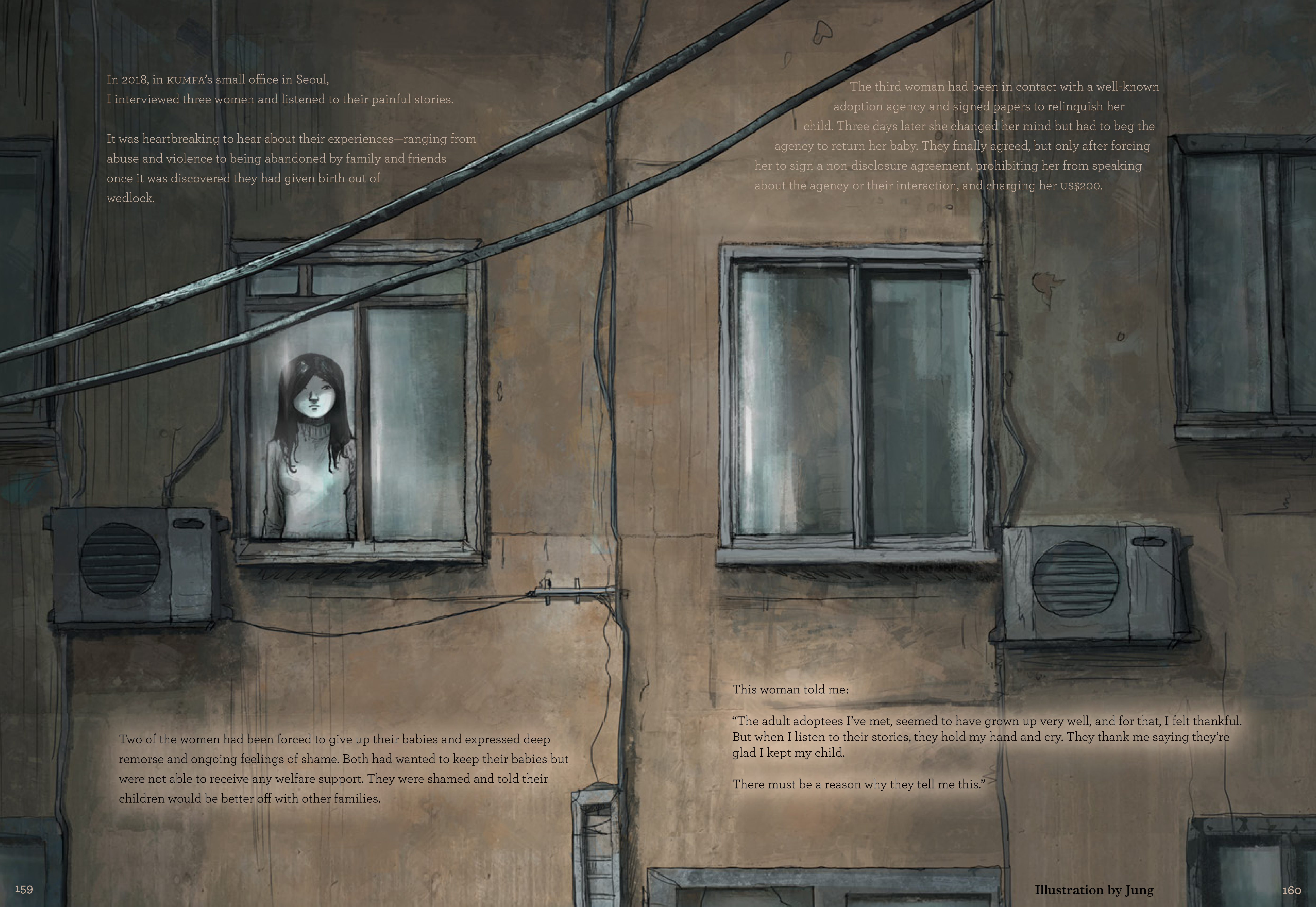
In 2019, all children sent for overseas adoption in South Korea came from unwed mothers. Issues related to sexuality, sex, and cohabitation remain taboo, rarely discussed openly or casually.

A 2012 study revealed that 83% of single parents receive no financial support from the other parent.

For those who qualify, a mother can receive a maximum of $180 per month in welfare support, but only if she meets strict income and age requirements. In 2020, the country had the highest poverty rate among single-parents in OECD countries.

To be eligible for this grant, her monthly income must be less than $1,400. This system makes it challenging for women to work full-time and even harder to make ends meet.

In Korea, there is an organisation called KUMFA, Korean Unwed Mothers Families Association, which works to support and advocate for the rights of unwed mothers from a feminist and political standpoint. Founded in 2009, KUMFA provides its members with therapy, education, networking opportunities, community support, lectures, and both legal and emotional guidance.



In 2018, in KUMFA's small office in Seoul,
I interviewed three women and listened to their painful stories.

It was heartbreaking to hear about their experiences—ranging from abuse and violence to being abandoned by family and friends once it was discovered they had given birth out of wedlock.

Two of the women had been forced to give up their babies and expressed deep remorse and ongoing feelings of shame. Both had wanted to keep their babies but were not able to receive any welfare support. They were shamed and told their children would be better off with other families.

The third woman had been in contact with a well-known adoption agency and signed papers to relinquish her child. Three days later she changed her mind but had to beg the agency to return her baby. They finally agreed, but only after forcing her to sign a non-disclosure agreement, prohibiting her from speaking about the agency or their interaction, and charging her US$200.

This woman told me:

"The adult adoptees I've met, seemed to have grown up very well, and for that, I felt thankful. But when I listen to their stories, they hold my hand and cry. They thank me saying they're glad I kept my child.

There must be a reason why they tell me this."

Illustration by Jung

Abortion was decriminalized by the Constitutional Court as late as 2019 but the failure to overlook and revise related laws put abortion in an undefined legal landscape. The ambiguity has left women hesitant to seek out professional medical abortion services and the medical professionals wary of potential legal repercussions.

Blood ties have been important for Koreans for a very long time, with adoption from outside the family being historically uncommon.

We were not abandoned by our mothers, but our mothers had been abandoned by society.

I began to see a system where an exposed and vulnerable group, who do not receive any support from society, in turn, leave their children to private adoption agencies which have made a profit for decades by sending babies to countries with stronger economies and welfare.

I heard testimony upon testimony of adult adoptees who discovered falsified information and pure lies in their adoption files.

The West's desire for children seemed to outweigh everything else.

It overshadowed the voices of unwed mothers without access to power, justice, financial resources, and the opportunity to be heard, in a country far away..

In recent years, the South Korean government has taken steps to reduce international adoptions, instead promoting domestic adoption within Korea. The goal has been to encourage Korean families to adopt children from their own country, rather than sending them overseas.

South Korea has made efforts to align with the Hague Adoption Convention, established in 1993 to increase domestic adoption and reduce child trafficking, corruption, and illegal adoptions worldwide.

Although Korea signed the convention in 2013, the ratification process was delayed due to the need for several legal amendments. The South Korean parliament is expected to ratify the Hague Adoption Convention by 2025.

Once the necessary laws are enacted and the Convention is ratified, the country's adoption system will shift from being managed by private agencies to one where the state assumes responsibility.

A step toward reform came in 2012 with the introduction of the "Special Adoption Act." This law mandates that a child's birth must be registered before they can be given up for adoption, and that all adoptions must receive court approval. The act was designed to enhance the transparency of the adoption process and to assist adoptees in locating their birth parents if they choose to do so.

However, due to the strong stigma against unwed mothers, the registration can feel precarious for some women.

Simultaneously, a growing problem has received widespread attention in the Korean and international news about the country's alarmingly low birth rate now declared "a national emergency".

Currently, the average is 0.72 child per woman, the lowest birth rate in the world, leading to a rapidly aging population and insufficient generational growth. Without intervention, projections suggest that Koreans could face extinction within 700 years.

In fall 2023, the "Protected Birth Bill" was passed, allowing women to give birth at designated medical facilities without providing personal information or registering their child under the family registration system. A bill which was opposed by Human Rights Watch claiming it is failing to address the underlying reasons for unregistered births.

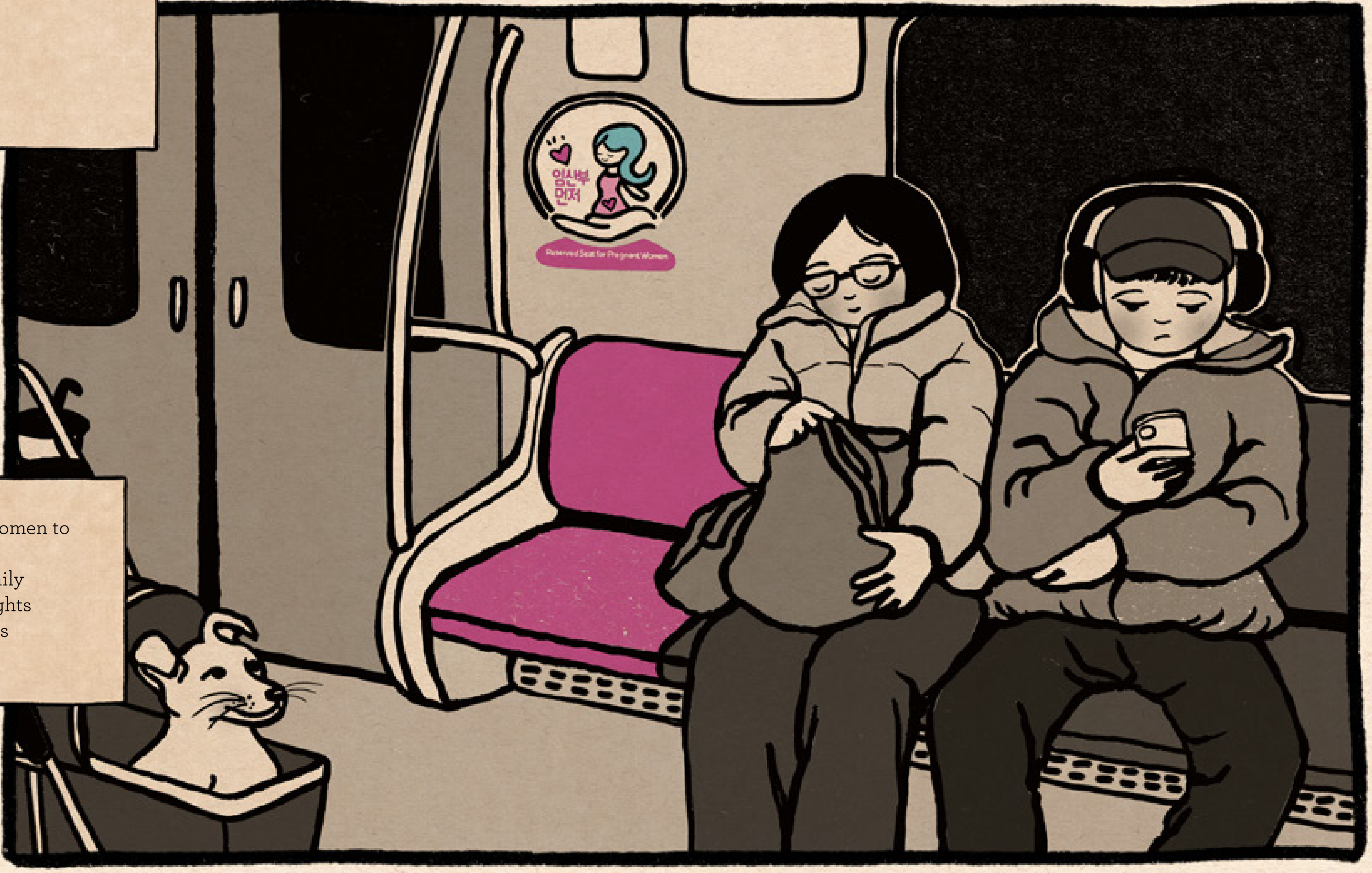
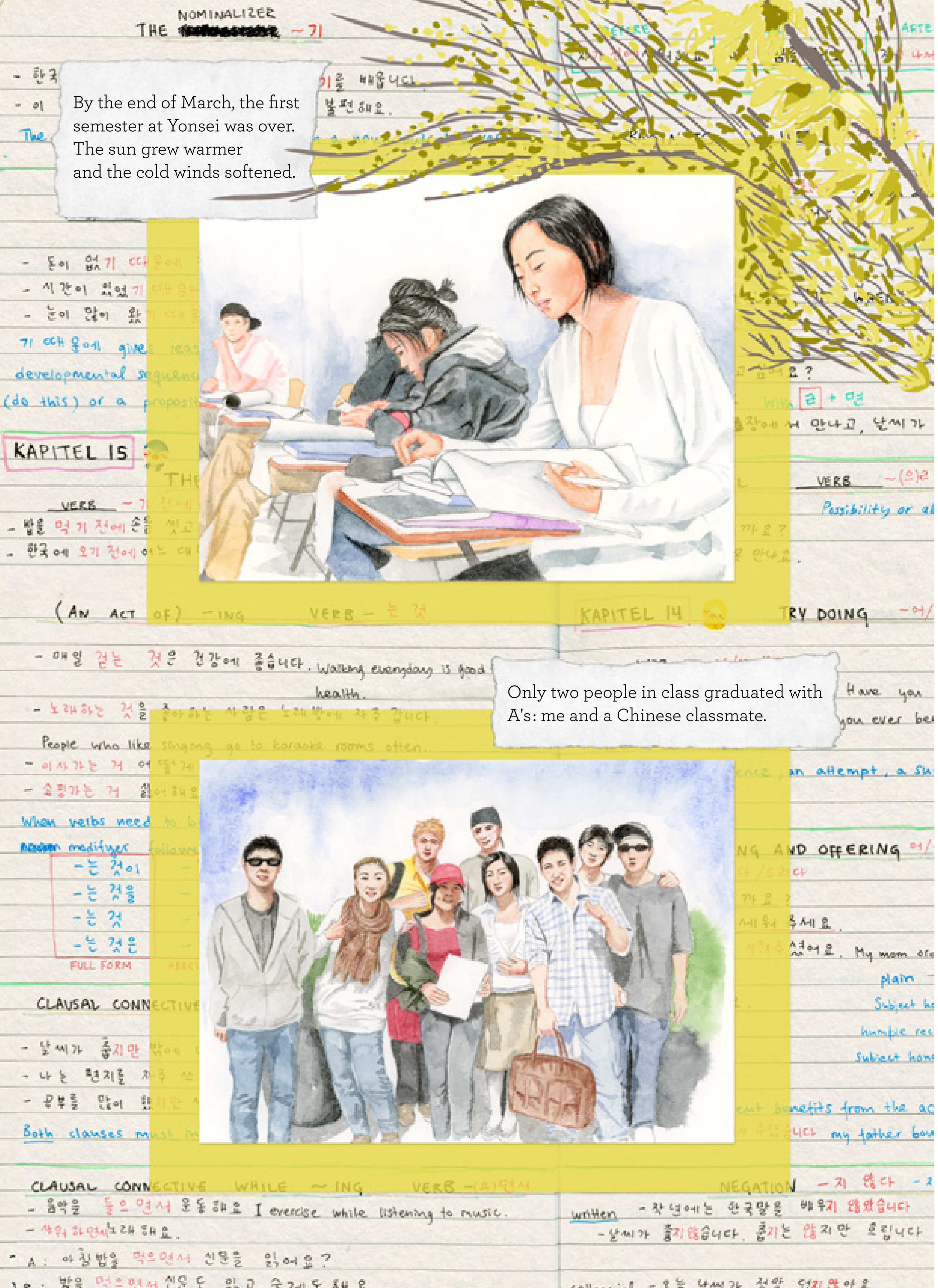

임산부
먼저
Reserved Seat for Pregnant Women

Illustration by Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom



By the end of March, the first semester at Yonsei was over. The sun grew warmer and the cold winds softened.

Only two people in class graduated with A's: me and a Chinese classmate.

In June, I visited my family one last time before I had to travel back to Sweden.

Together, we went to a small island off the southern coast and rented a cabin to stay in. It was a relief to be able to spend time with my family outside the city noise and hustle. The landscape was now green and in bloom. I still didn't find it beautiful. But it was alive.

By now I could have simple conversations with my family. I found out that my sisters were creative. They used to paint and write poetry when they were young, something they never had the chance to develop. My father played a little guitar and another relative used to be a painter.

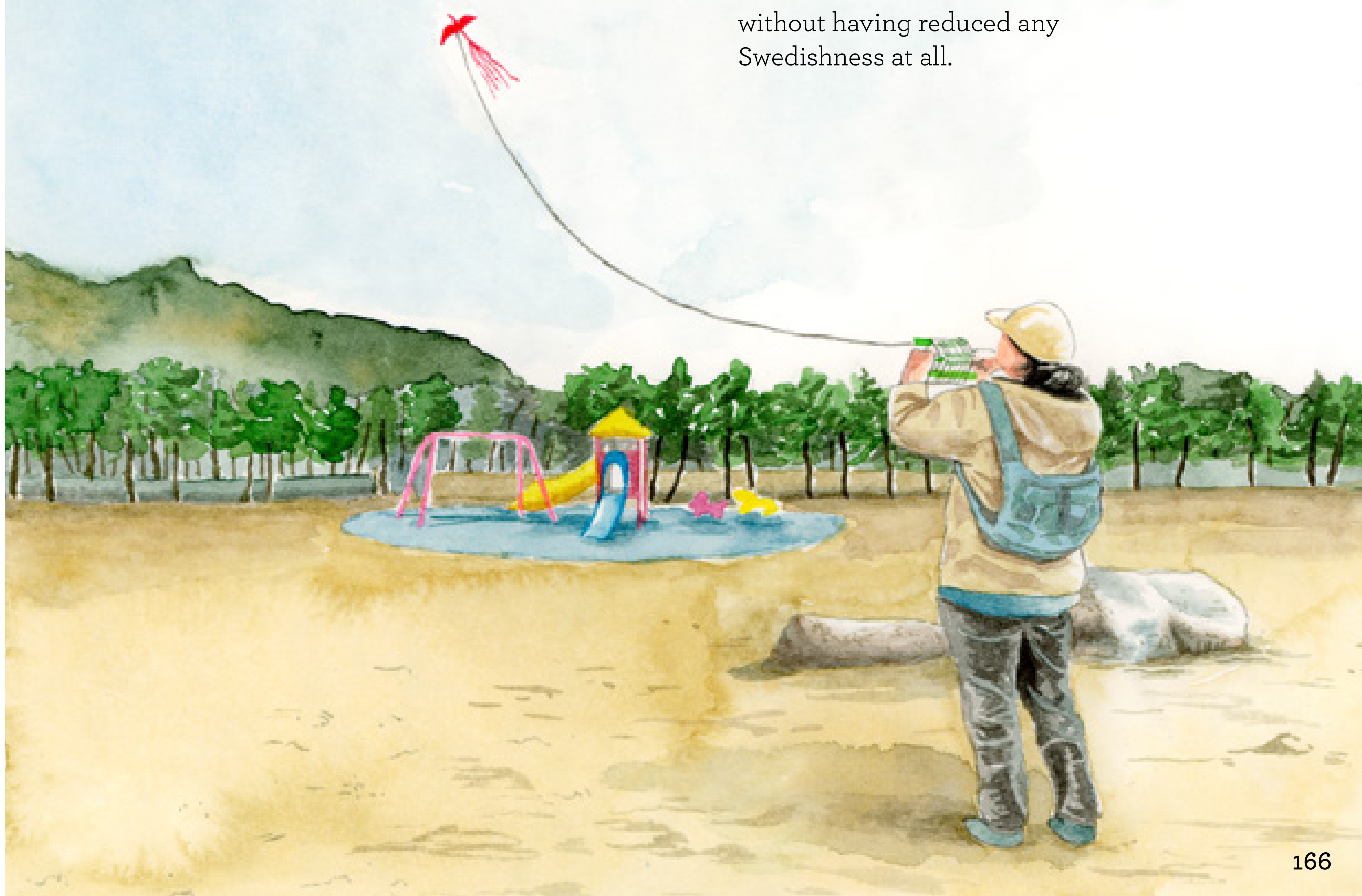
Is creativity something you inherit?

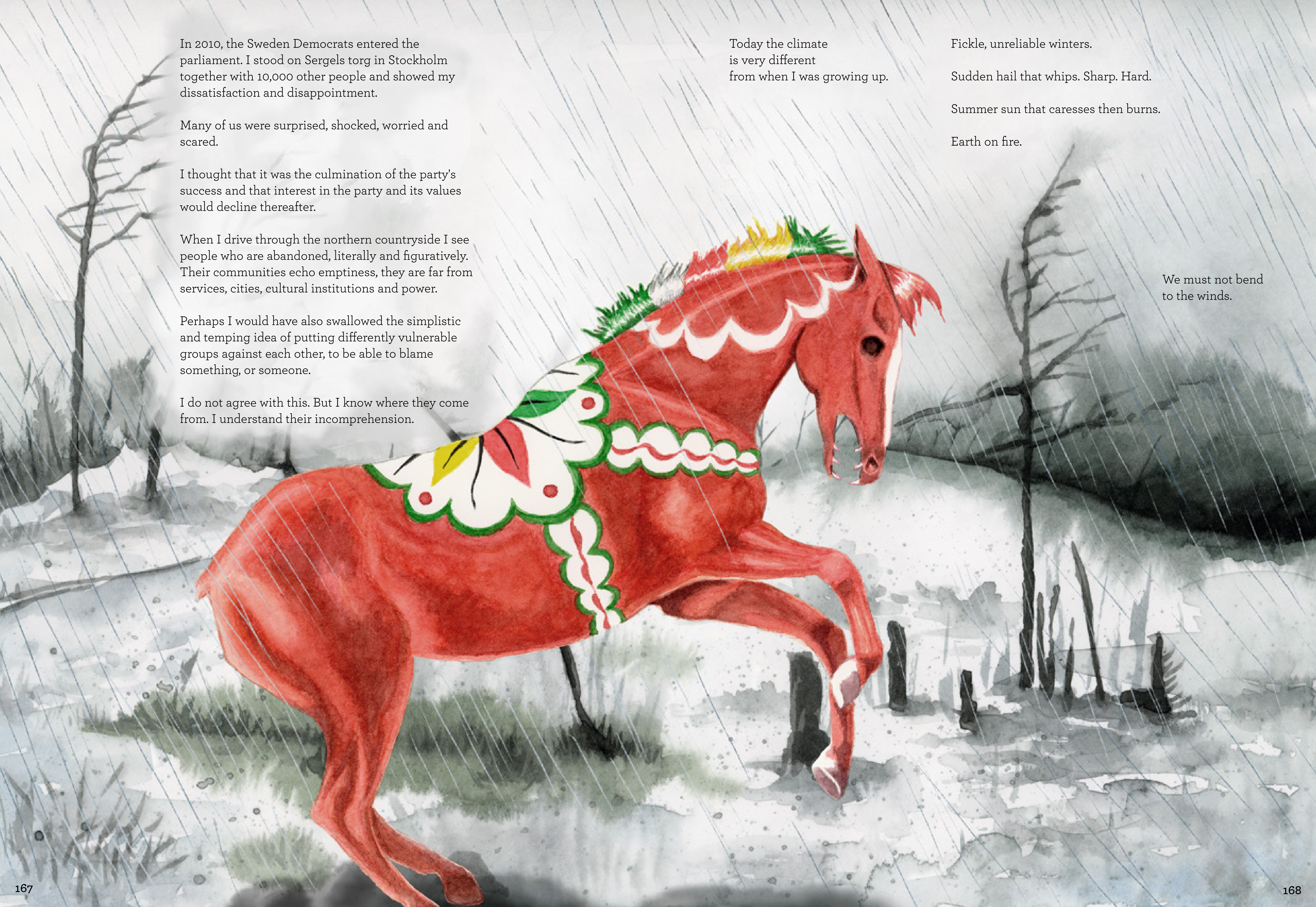
Before I said goodbye to my family, my father told me I should laugh and talk more. That I was so quiet. I didn't get angry this time, because the irony was that he was just like me. Quiet, introverted, determined and serious.

And none of us smiled in photos.

I left Korea with greater confidence, expanded language, and the feeling of having a new identity and ethnicity,

without having reduced any Swedishness at all.





In 2010, the Sweden Democrats entered the parliament. I stood on Sergels torg in Stockholm together with 10,000 other people and showed my dissatisfaction and disappointment.

Many of us were surprised, shocked, worried and scared.

I thought that it was the culmination of the party's success and that interest in the party and its values would decline thereafter.

When I drive through the northern countryside I see people who are abandoned, literally and figuratively. Their communities echo emptiness, they are far from services, cities, cultural institutions and power.

Perhaps I would have also swallowed the simplistic and temping idea of putting differently vulnerable groups against each other, to be able to blame something, or someone.

I do not agree with this. But I know where they come from. I understand their incomprehension.

Today the climate
is very different
from when I was growing up.

Fickle, unreliable winters.

Sudden hail that whips. Sharp. Hard.

Summer sun that caresses then burns.

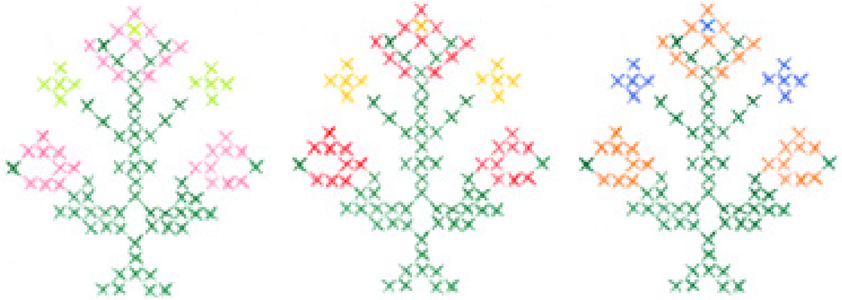
Earth on fire.

We must not bend
to the winds.

I started studying art history the same year.
At the same time I applied to the art university Konstfack and other art programs but wasn't accepted.

I learned about art. No doubt.
What art is, where it comes from. How it has been shaped and defined.

I also learned what is good and poor taste.



Poor taste is kitsch. That which is empty, superficial, ridiculous, inauthentic.

I actually didn't understand the concept of kitsch when my teachers first talked about it. But when they showed us examples, I was stunned.

It was the objects and images I had grown up with.
Items my mother had collected with care.

"You are very quiet. But when you do say something it is very good."

I was not the youngest student in the class, several younger students had already studied for a few years at the university in subjects like gender studies, philosophy and history.

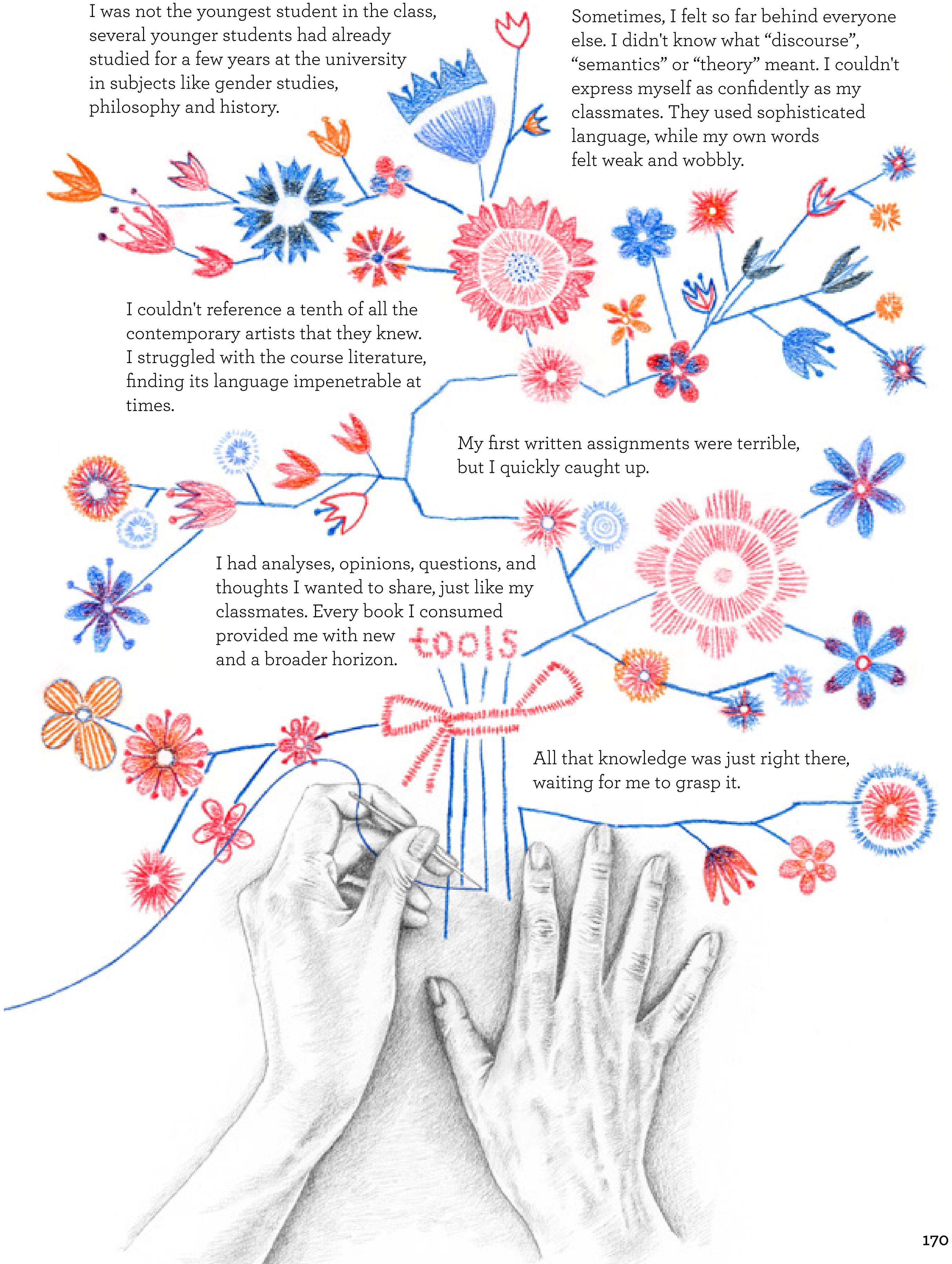
Sometimes, I felt so far behind everyone else. I didn't know what "discourse", "semantics" or "theory" meant. I couldn't express myself as confidently as my classmates. They used sophisticated language, while my own words felt weak and wobbly.

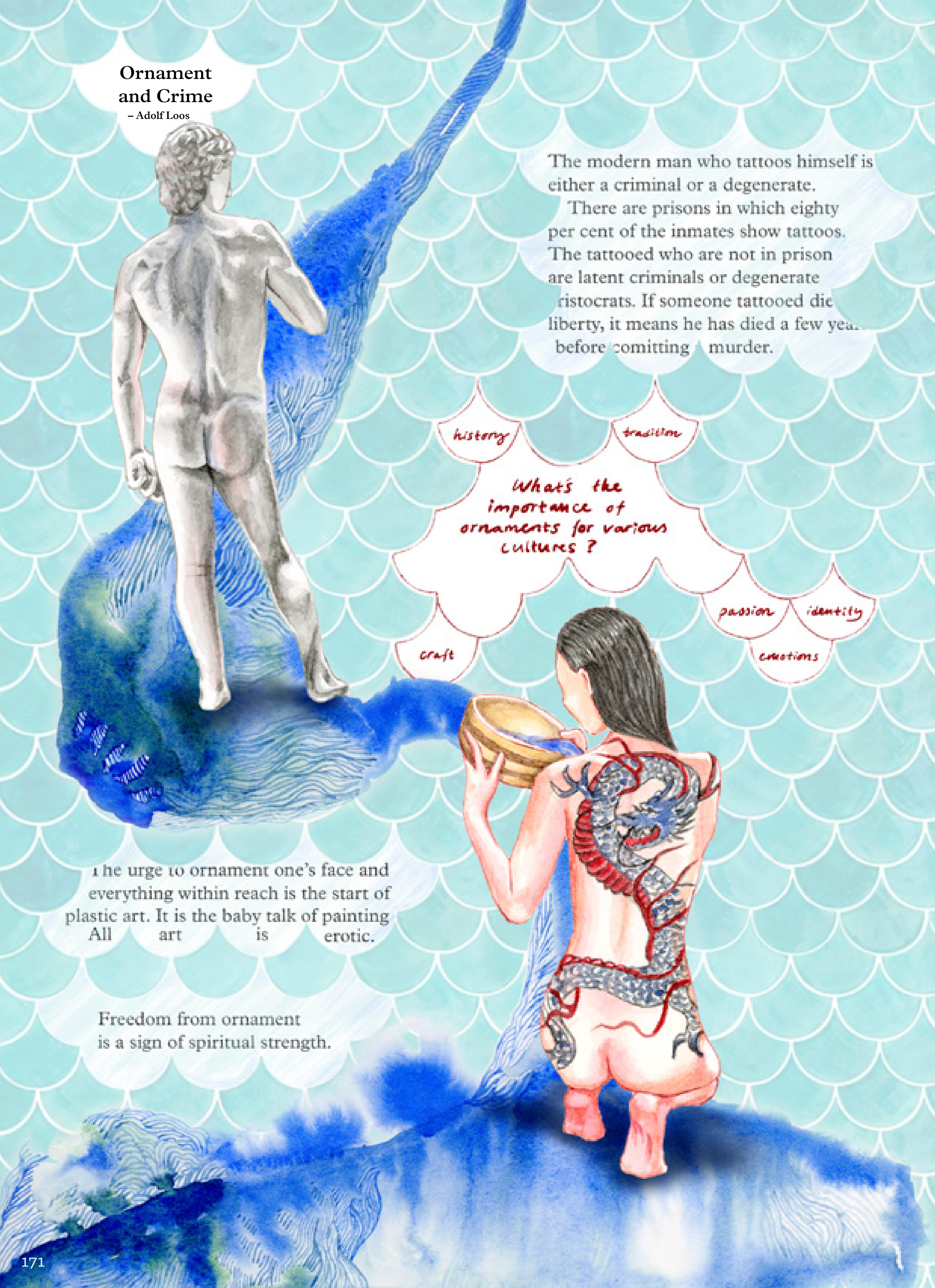
I couldn't reference a tenth of all the contemporary artists that they knew. I struggled with the course literature, finding its language impenetrable at times.

My first written assignments were terrible, but I quickly caught up.

I had analyses, opinions, questions, and thoughts I wanted to share, just like my classmates. Every book I consumed provided me with new tools and a broader horizon.

All that knowledge was just right there, waiting for me to grasp it.





Ornament and Crime

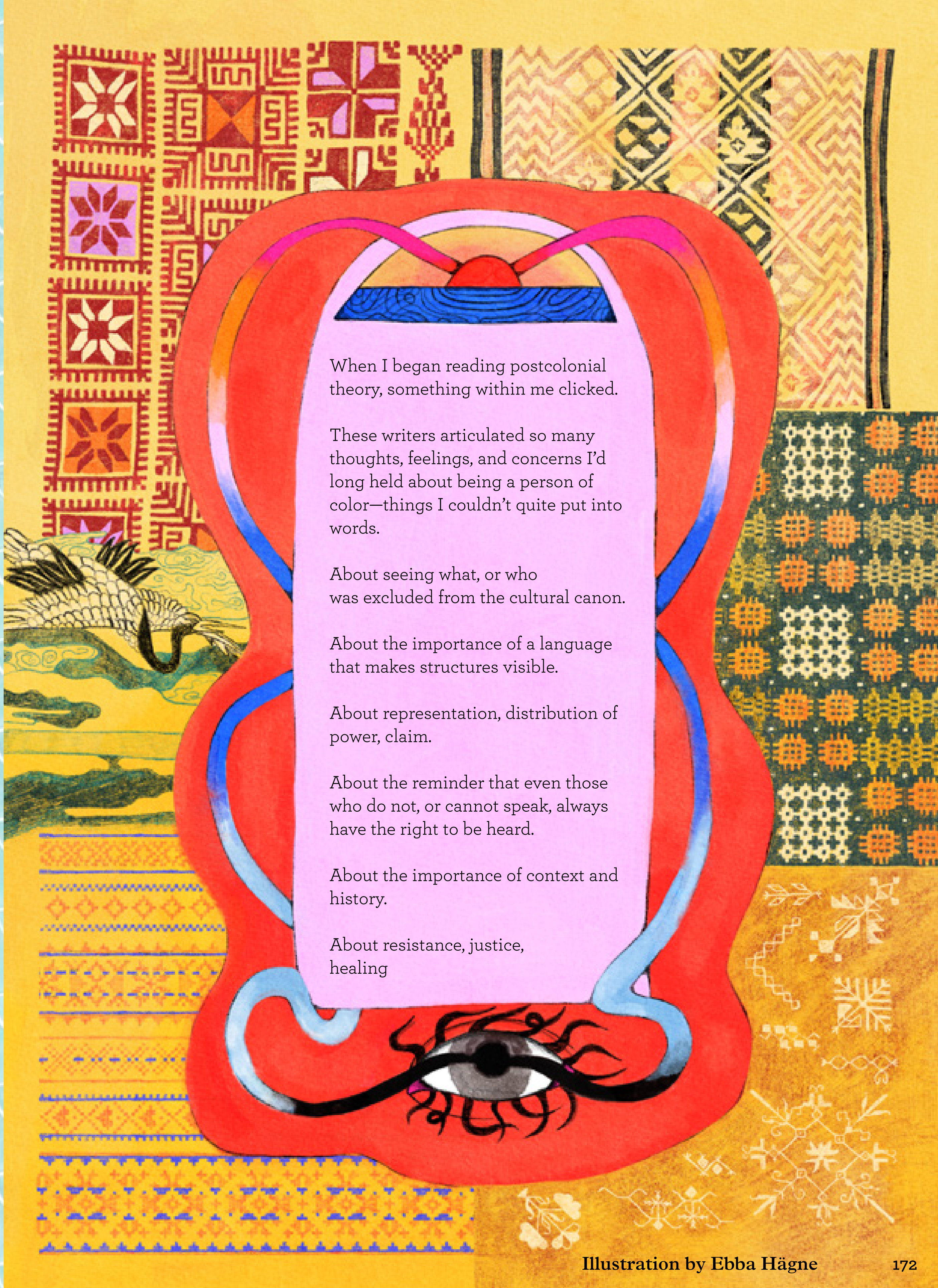
– Adolf Loos

The modern man who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate.
There are prisons in which eighty per cent of the inmates show tattoos. The tattooed who are not in prison are latent criminals or degenerate ristocrats. If someone tattooed die liberty, it means he has died a few yea before comitting murder.

history
tradition
What's the importance of ornaments for various cultures ?
passion
identity
craft
emotions

The urge to ornament one's face and everything within reach is the start of plastic art. It is the baby talk of painting All art is erotic.

Freedom from ornament is a sign of spiritual strength.



When I began reading postcolonial theory, something within me clicked.

These writers articulated so many thoughts, feelings, and concerns I'd long held about being a person of color—things I couldn't quite put into words.

About seeing what, or who
was excluded from the cultural canon.

About the importance of a language that makes structures visible.

About representation, distribution of power, claim.

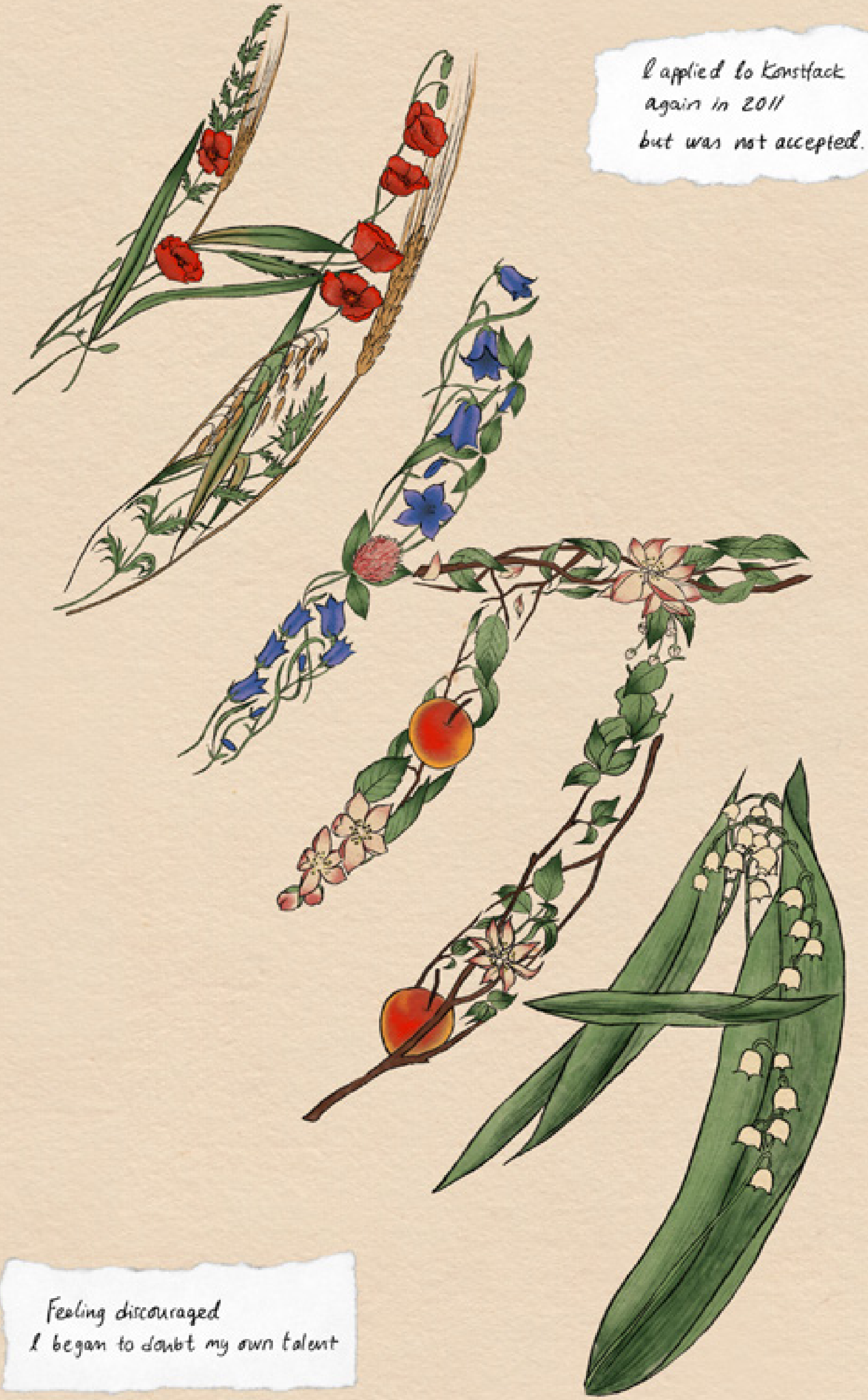
About the reminder that even those who do not, or cannot speak, always have the right to be heard.

About the importance of context and history.

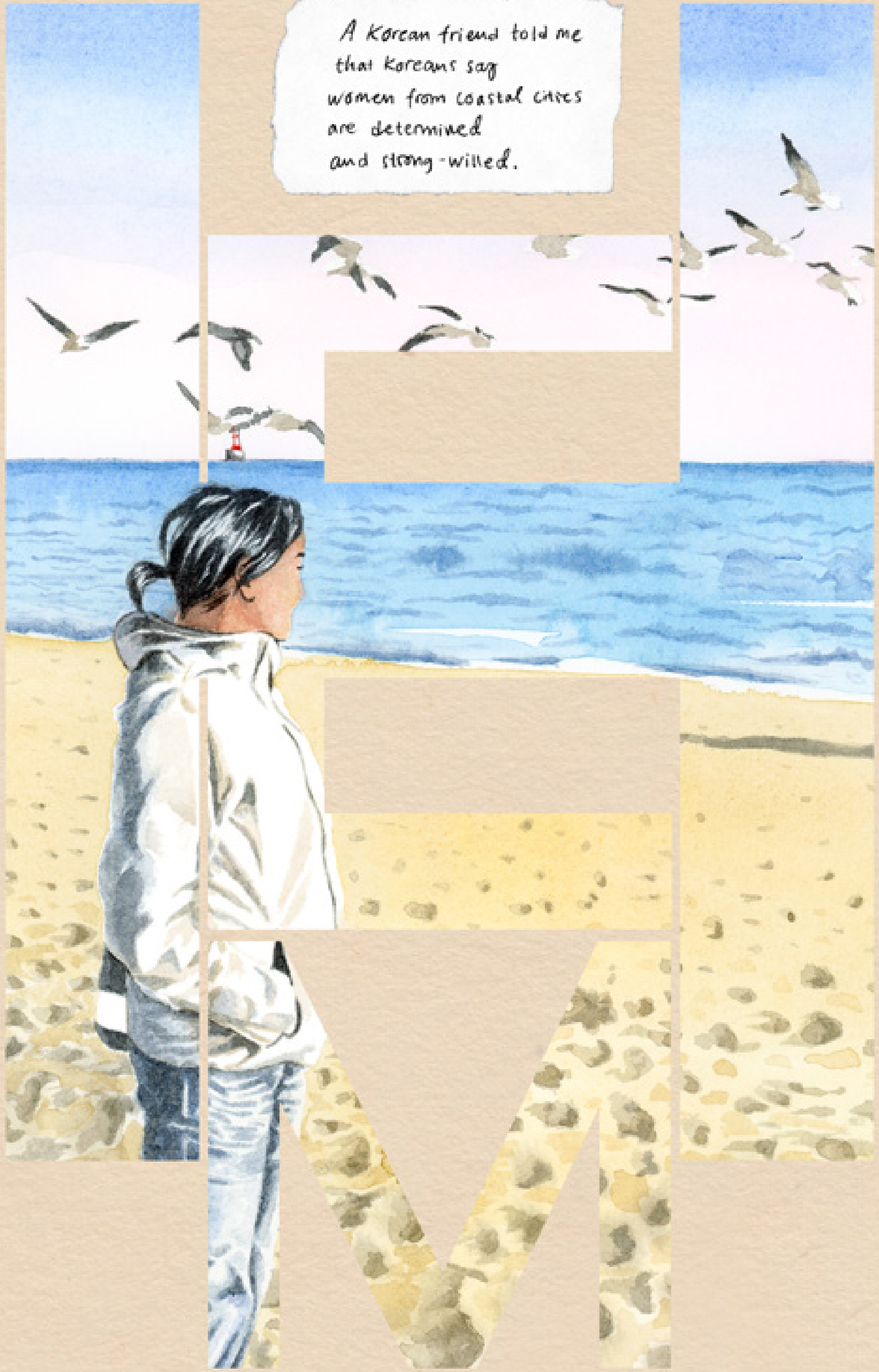
About resistance, justice,
healing

Illustration by Ebba Hägne

I applied to Konstfack
again in 2011
but was not accepted.



Feeling discouraged
I began to doubt my own talent

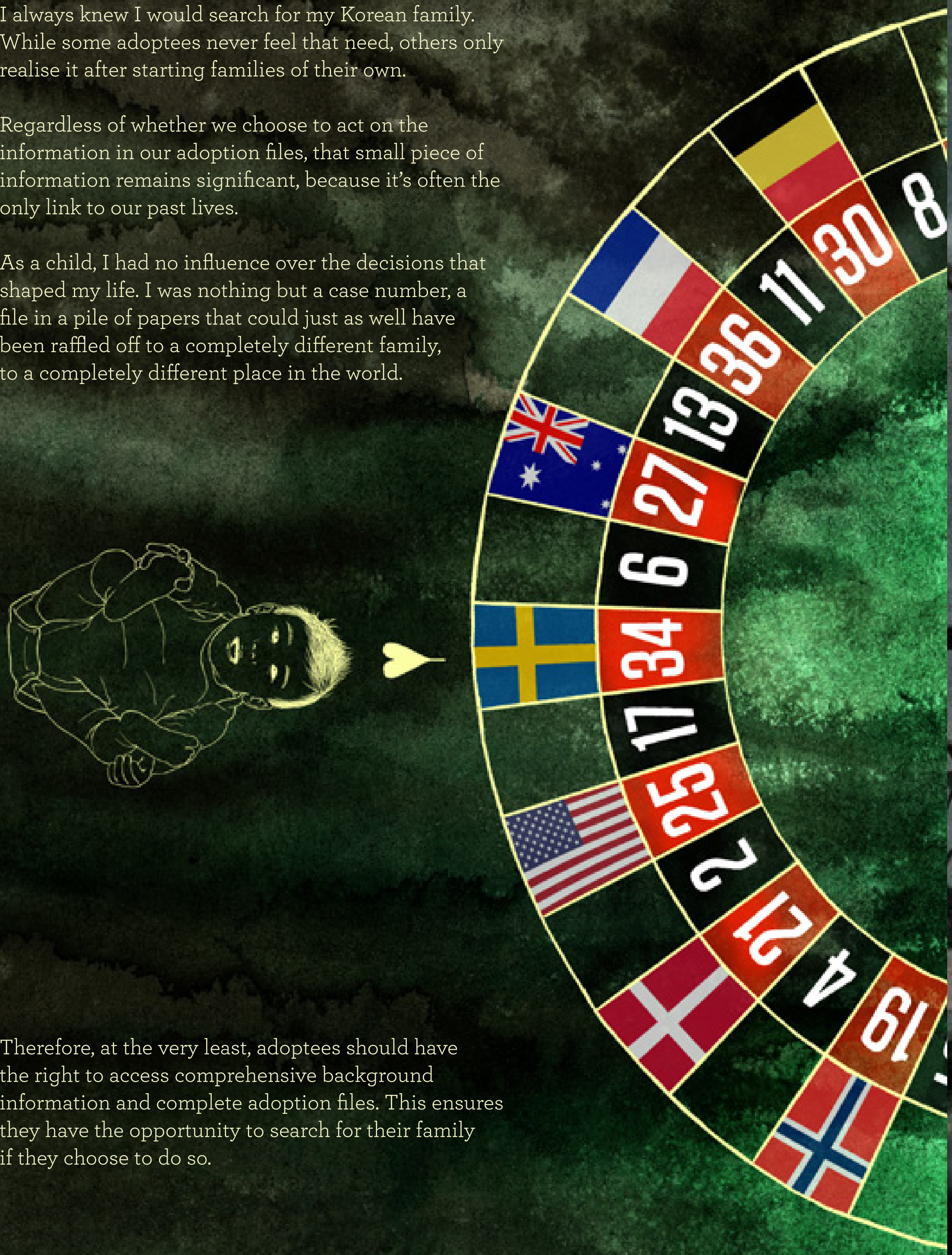


A Korean friend told me
that Koreans say
women from coastal cities
are determined
and strong-willed.

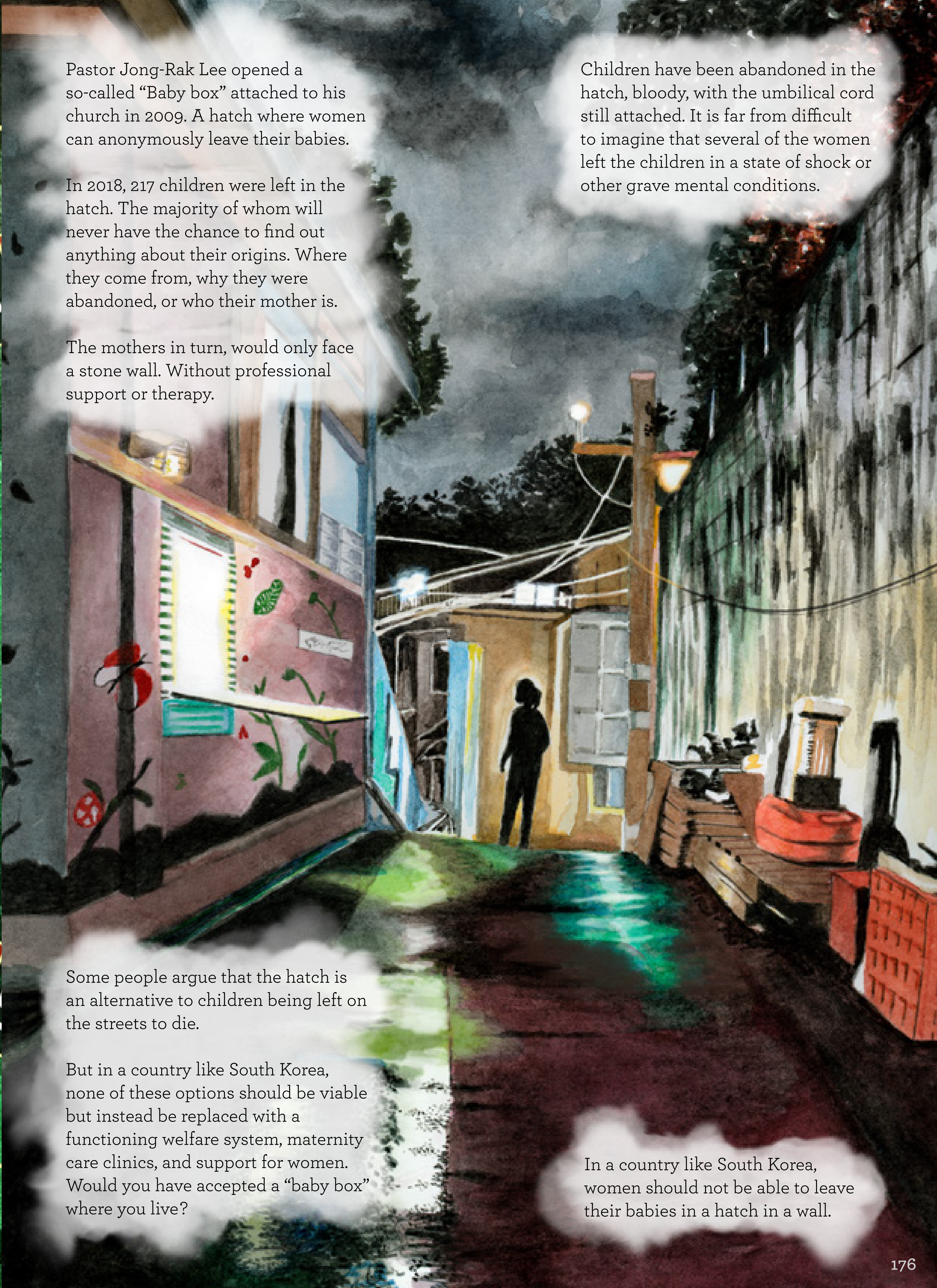
I always knew I would search for my Korean family. While some adoptees never feel that need, others only realise it after starting families of their own.

Regardless of whether we choose to act on the information in our adoption files, that small piece of information remains significant, because it's often the only link to our past lives.

As a child, I had no influence over the decisions that shaped my life. I was nothing but a case number, a file in a pile of papers that could just as well have been raffled off to a completely different family, to a completely different place in the world.



Therefore, at the very least, adoptees should have the right to access comprehensive background information and complete adoption files. This ensures they have the opportunity to search for their family if they choose to do so.



Pastor Jong-Rak Lee opened a so-called "Baby box" attached to his church in 2009. A hatch where women can anonymously leave their babies.

In 2018, 217 children were left in the hatch. The majority of whom will never have the chance to find out anything about their origins. Where they come from, why they were abandoned, or who their mother is.

The mothers in turn, would only face a stone wall. Without professional support or therapy.

Children have been abandoned in the hatch, bloody, with the umbilical cord still attached. It is far from difficult to imagine that several of the women left the children in a state of shock or other grave mental conditions.

Some people argue that the hatch is an alternative to children being left on the streets to die.

But in a country like South Korea, none of these options should be viable but instead be replaced with a functioning welfare system, maternity care clinics, and support for women. Would you have accepted a "baby box" where you live?

In a country like South Korea, women should not be able to leave their babies in a hatch in a wall.

I went searching for my roots. I didn't become more whole, nor did I find clear answers. But I found my family and I no longer have to wonder, long for or speculate.

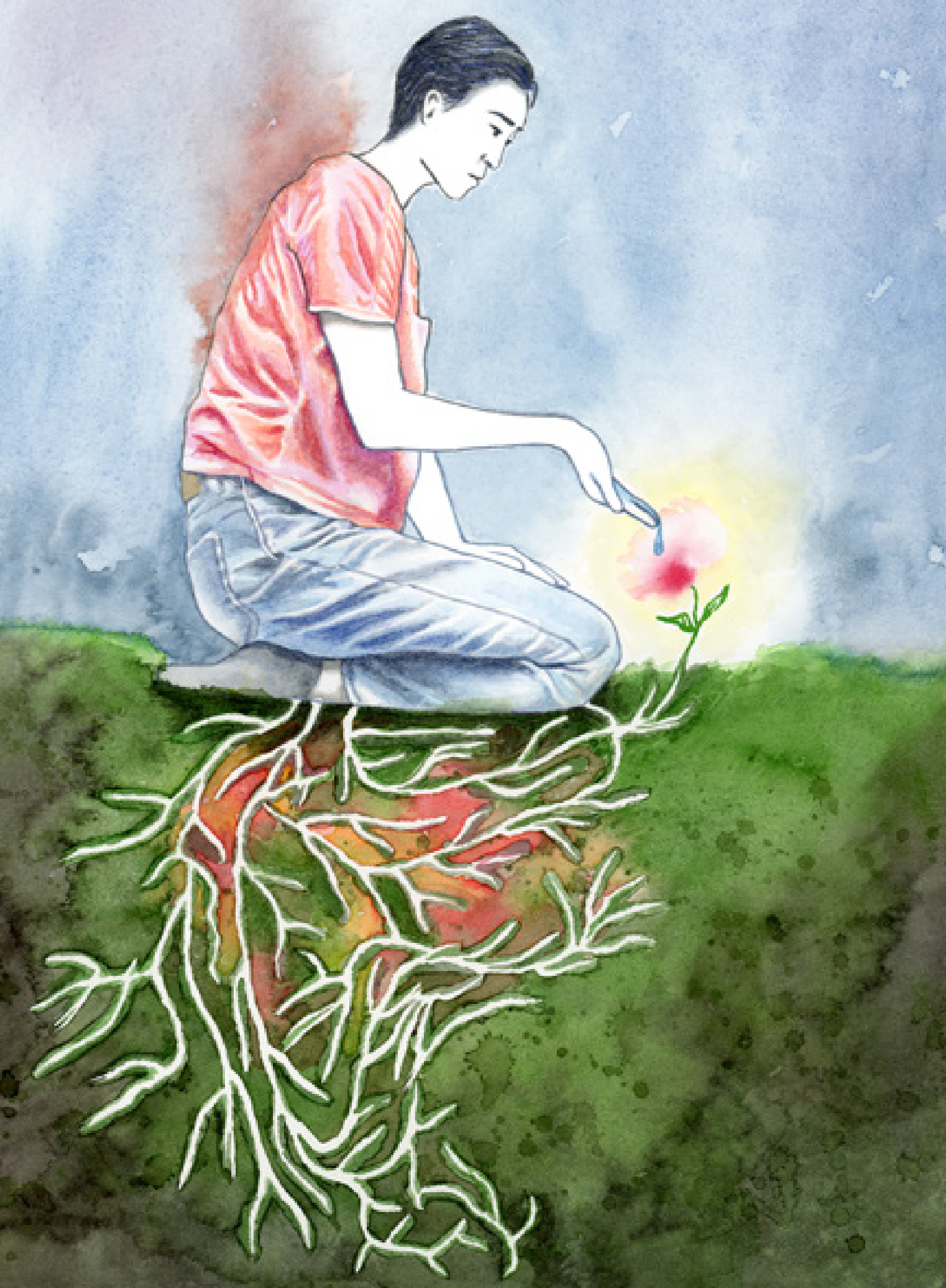
I have many friends who have been reunited with their families, but just as many who searched without success. They still yearn, wonder, dream and lose hope with each passing year in the race against time.

In their papers, it is often written:

“found outside the police station”

“abandoned by the roadside”

After repeated reports of illegal adoptions that took place in Chile, China, India, South Korea and many more countries, some worry that these hollow sentences might mean they were a stolen child who was sold for adoption.



In China, in November 2005, 27 people were charged with child trafficking. It was discovered that since 2002, the Hengyang Social Welfare Institute orphanage had been buying children from traffickers and reselling them to other orphanages—a total of six identified.

When the orphanage was approved for international adoption in 2004, they were able to make money by sending the children for adoption to countries such as the USA, the Netherlands, and Sweden, receiving about 3,000 USD per child from adoptive parents.

Witnesses from desperate parents in both Hunan and Guangdong provinces reported that their children were kidnapped and sold. The trafficking ring targeted migrant workers, who would have been given lower priority by the police.

A total of ten people were convicted of human trafficking. The exact number of stolen children sent abroad remains unknown, but estimates range from a few hundred to a thousand in just three years.

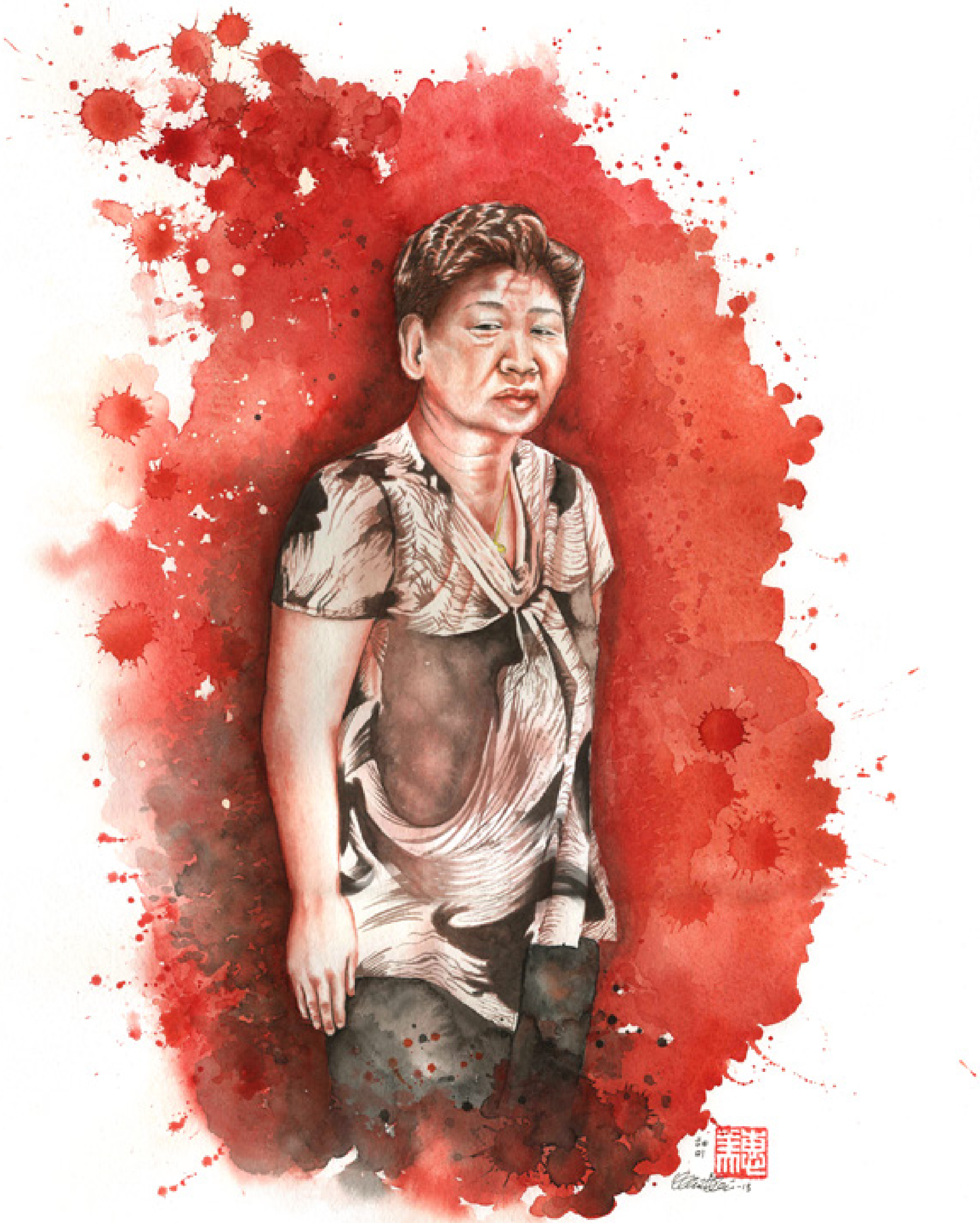
Following the verdict, China shut down all media reports on the scandal, making it even harder for the affected families to seek justice. Most families will never see their children again.

While the news attracted significant attention in the USA, it was hardly mentioned in Sweden. Neither China nor Sweden changed any rules, guidelines or processes for managing adoptions between the countries.

In these children's adoption files, it very likely says:

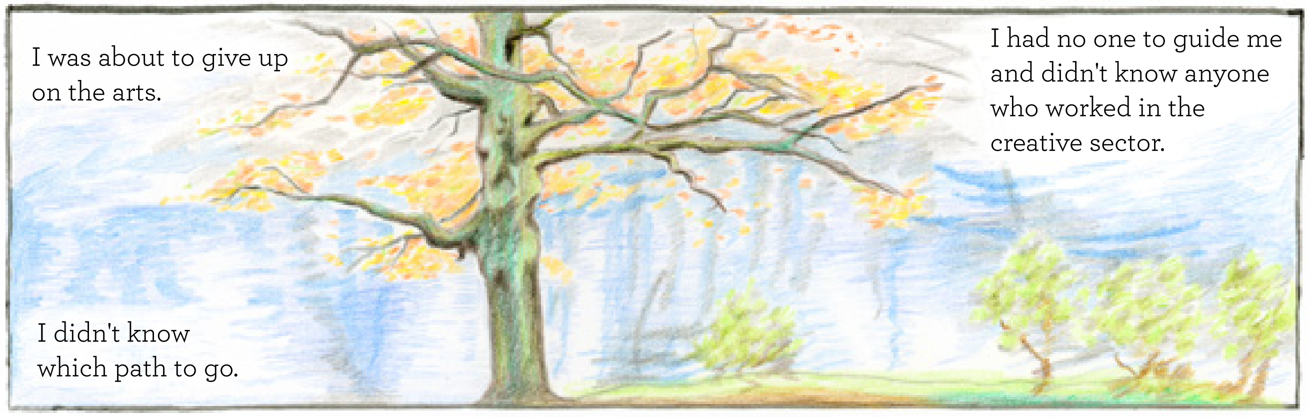
“left by the roadside”

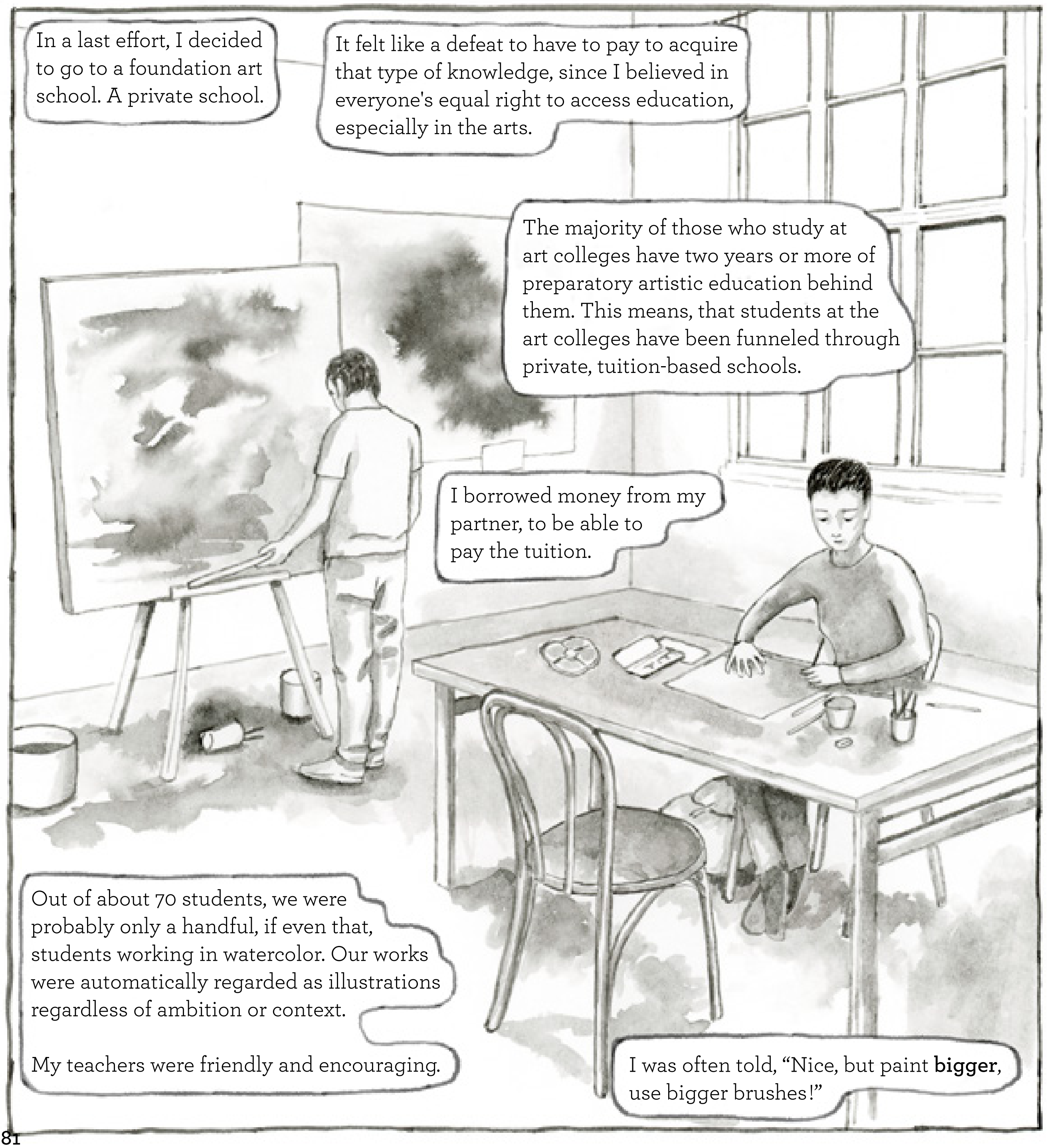
“abandoned child”

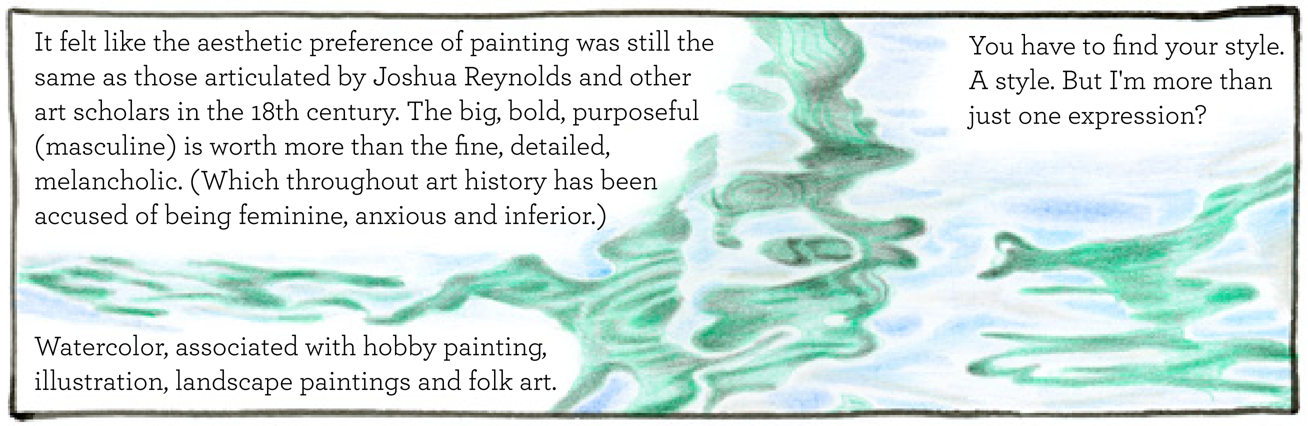


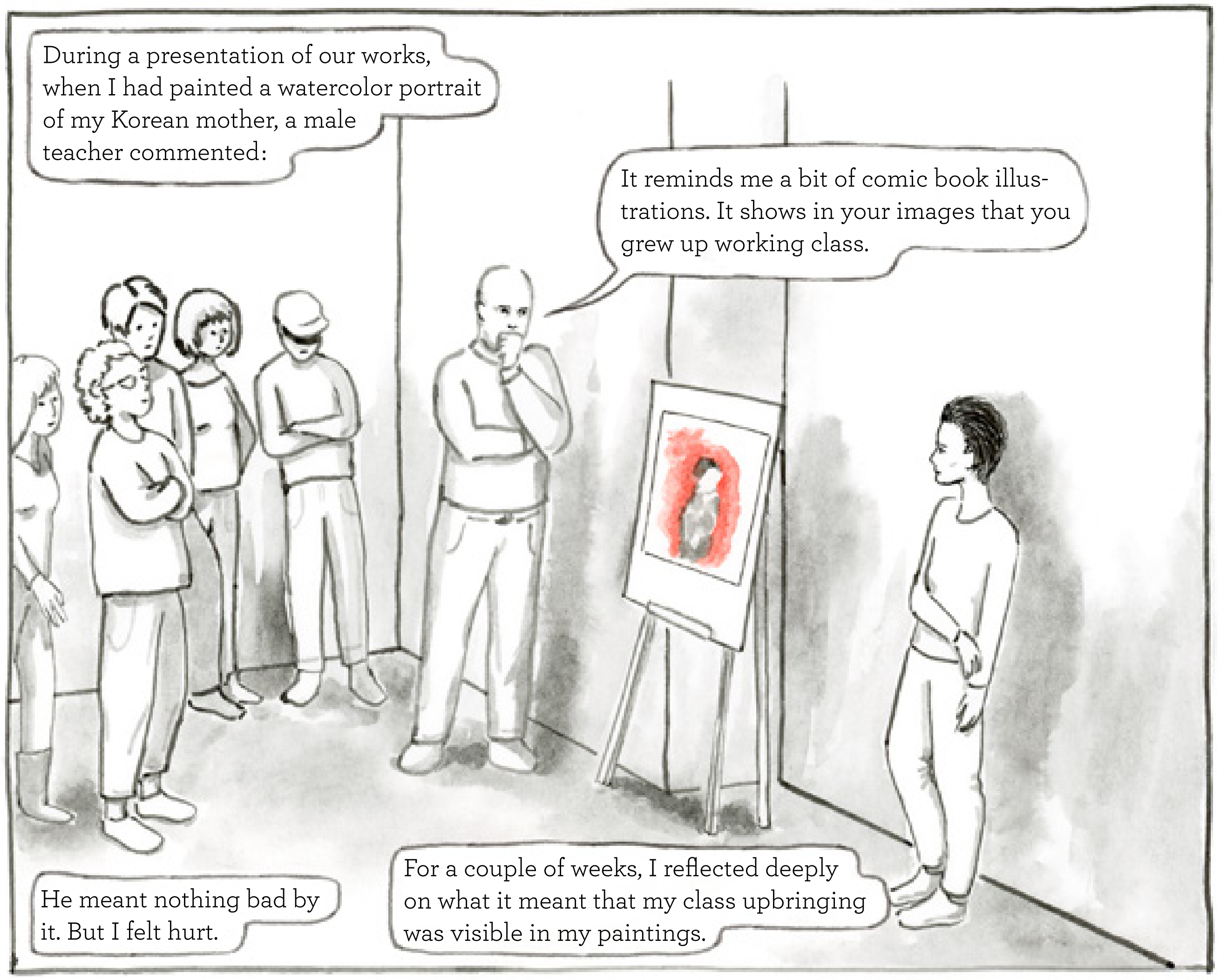
Främling vad döljer du för mig
i dina mörka ögon
en svag nyans av ljus nånstans men ändå
En främling, så känner jag för dig
Jag ber dig låt mig få veta
Vem vill du vara kan du förklara det för mig?

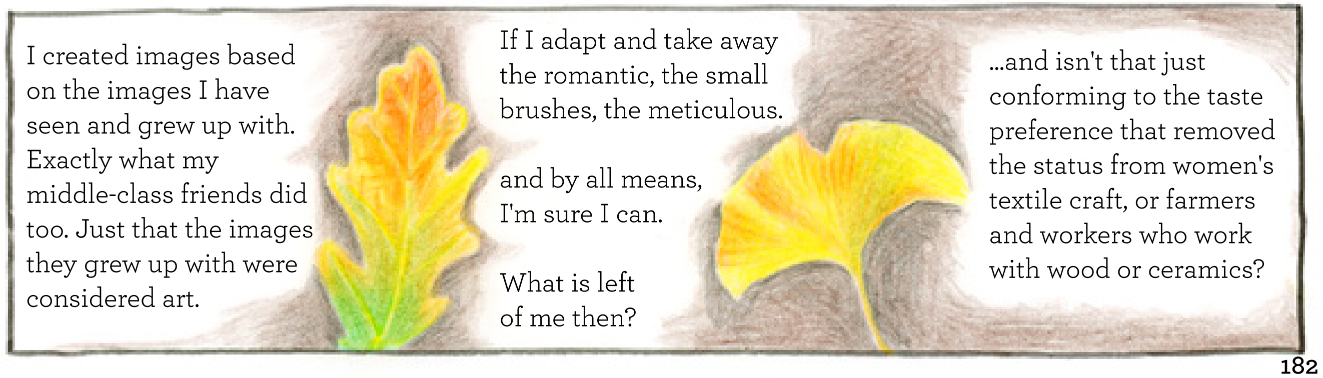
Som Mona Lisa har sitt leende
så gömmer också du en hemlighet
stjärnor jag ser dom vill gärna ta ner nån till dig
där bortom himlen finns en hemlighet
om du vill upptäcka den här med mig
ta första stegen och visa mig vägen ikväll
en känsla och jag litar på den
Sen blir vår kärlek aldrig främmande igen.


I was about to give up on the arts.
I had no one to guide me and didn't know anyone who worked in the creative sector.
I didn't know which path to go.


In a last effort, I decided to go to a foundation art school. A private school.
It felt like a defeat to have to pay to acquire that type of knowledge, since I believed in everyone's equal right to access education, especially in the arts.
The majority of those who study at art colleges have two years or more of preparatory artistic education behind them. This means, that students at the art colleges have been funneled through private, tuition-based schools.
I borrowed money from my partner, to be able to pay the tuition.
Out of about 70 students, we were probably only a handful, if even that, students working in watercolor. Our works were automatically regarded as illustrations regardless of ambition or context.
My teachers were friendly and encouraging.
I was often told, "Nice, but paint **bigger**, use bigger brushes!"


It felt like the aesthetic preference of painting was still the same as those articulated by Joshua Reynolds and other art scholars in the 18th century. The big, bold, purposeful (masculine) is worth more than the fine, detailed, melancholic. (Which throughout art history has been accused of being feminine, anxious and inferior.)
You have to find your style. A style. But I'm more than just one expression?
Watercolor, associated with hobby painting, illustration, landscape paintings and folk art.

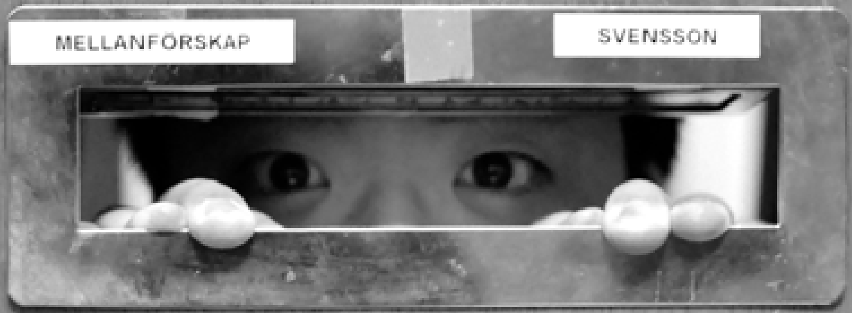

During a presentation of our works, when I had painted a watercolor portrait of my Korean mother, a male teacher commented:
It reminds me a bit of comic book illustrations. It shows in your images that you grew up working class.
He meant nothing bad by it. But I felt hurt.
For a couple of weeks, I reflected deeply on what it meant that my class upbringing was visible in my paintings.


I created images based on the images I have seen and grew up with. Exactly what my middle-class friends did too. Just that the images they grew up with were considered art.
If I adapt and take away the romantic, the small brushes, the meticulous.
and by all means, I'm sure I can.
What is left of me then?
...and isn't that just conforming to the taste preference that removed the status from women's textile craft, or farmers and workers who work with wood or ceramics?

After one year of the two-year foundation art education, I applied to Konstfack for the third time, but directly to the two-year Master's program.

I applied to Konstfack and told them what my images held.

Many identities. Stories of being adopted, being a woman, being raised working class, being from the North, and being a person of color.



Being an artist and illustrator.

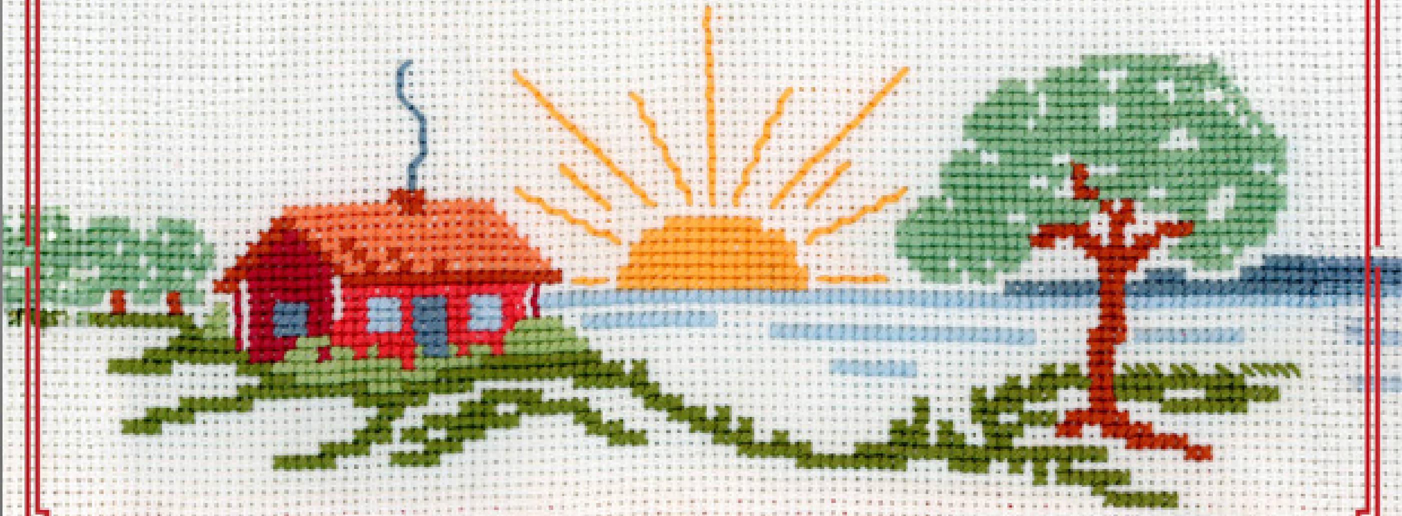
Being Swedish and Korean.

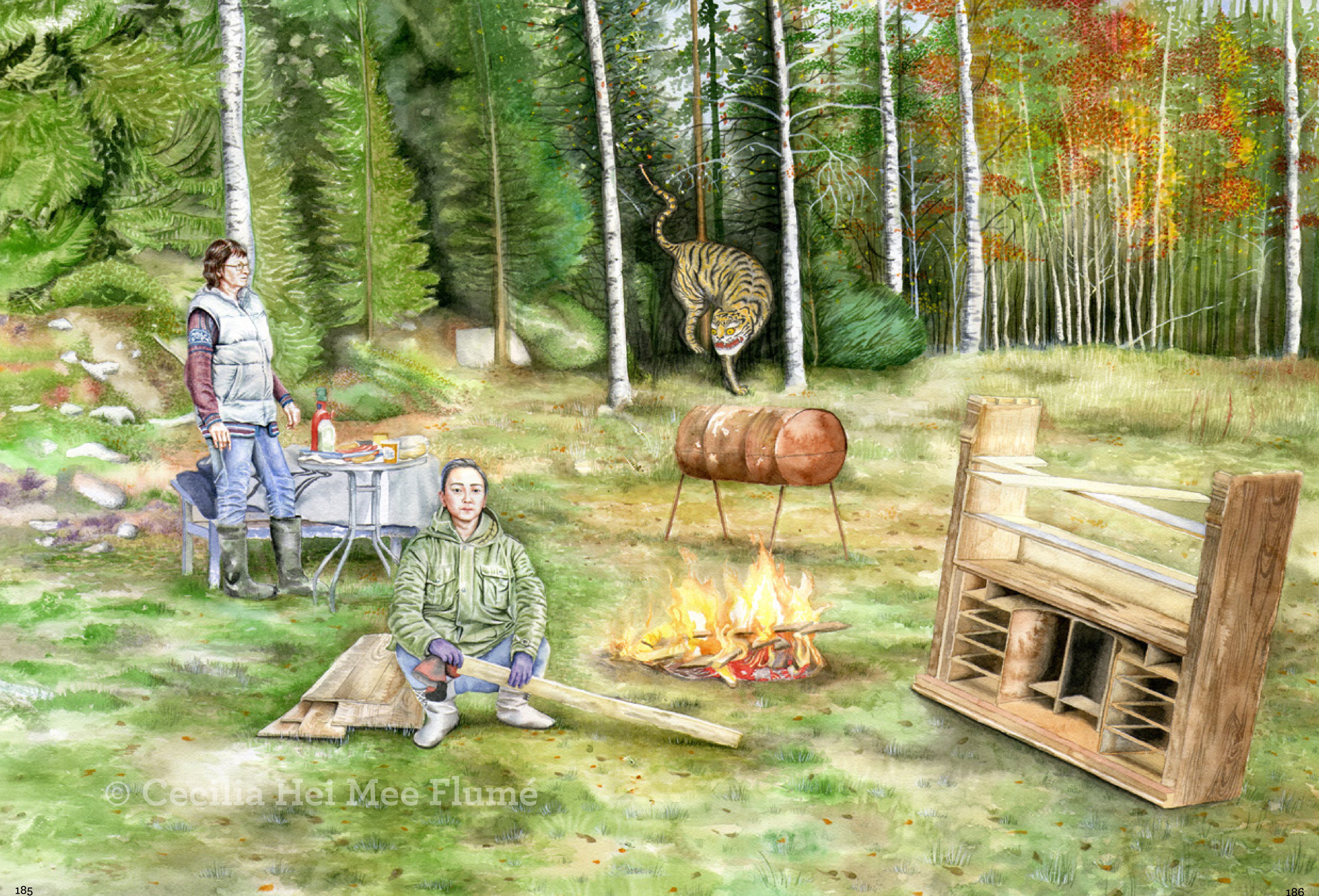
And to sometimes be in between.

Then I waited again.

In the spring of 2014, I was informed I had been accepted to a two-year Master's program at Konstfack.

I began my graduation project, a graphic novel about my adoption. A story about finding home.
Finding multiple homes.





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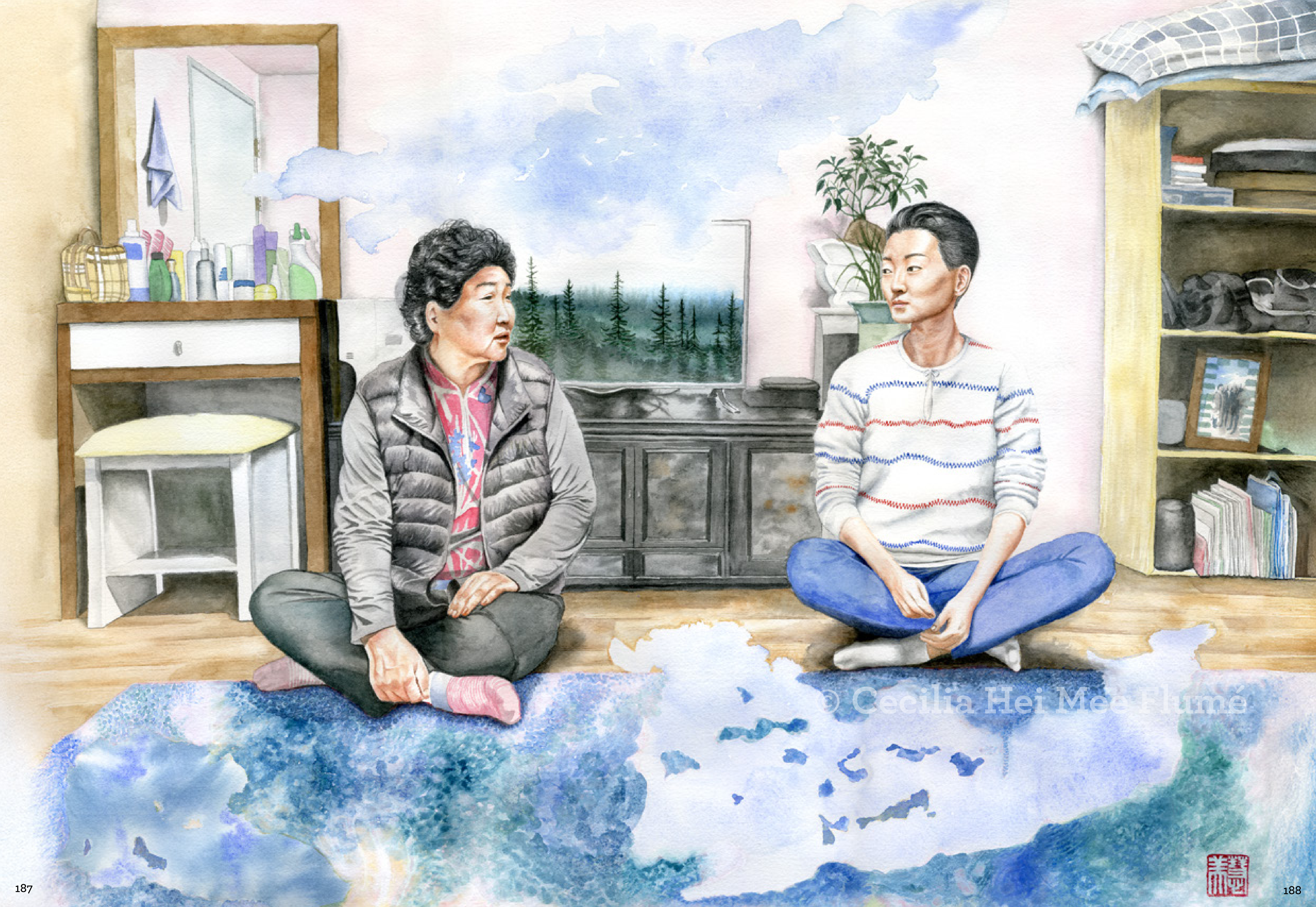

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In the spring of 2019, Konstfack announced a new and unique, fully funded doctoral position in illustration.

I applied with my updated and reshaped Master's project.

On the 21st of August, I was called for an interview and cried the whole remainder of the day because I was convinced that I had performed terribly.

On October 24th, when working as a customer support agent, I received a call from Konstfack. I had gotten the position.

After the new year, the COVID pandemic was a fact. I was unemployed and the PhD student position was postponed until the fall.

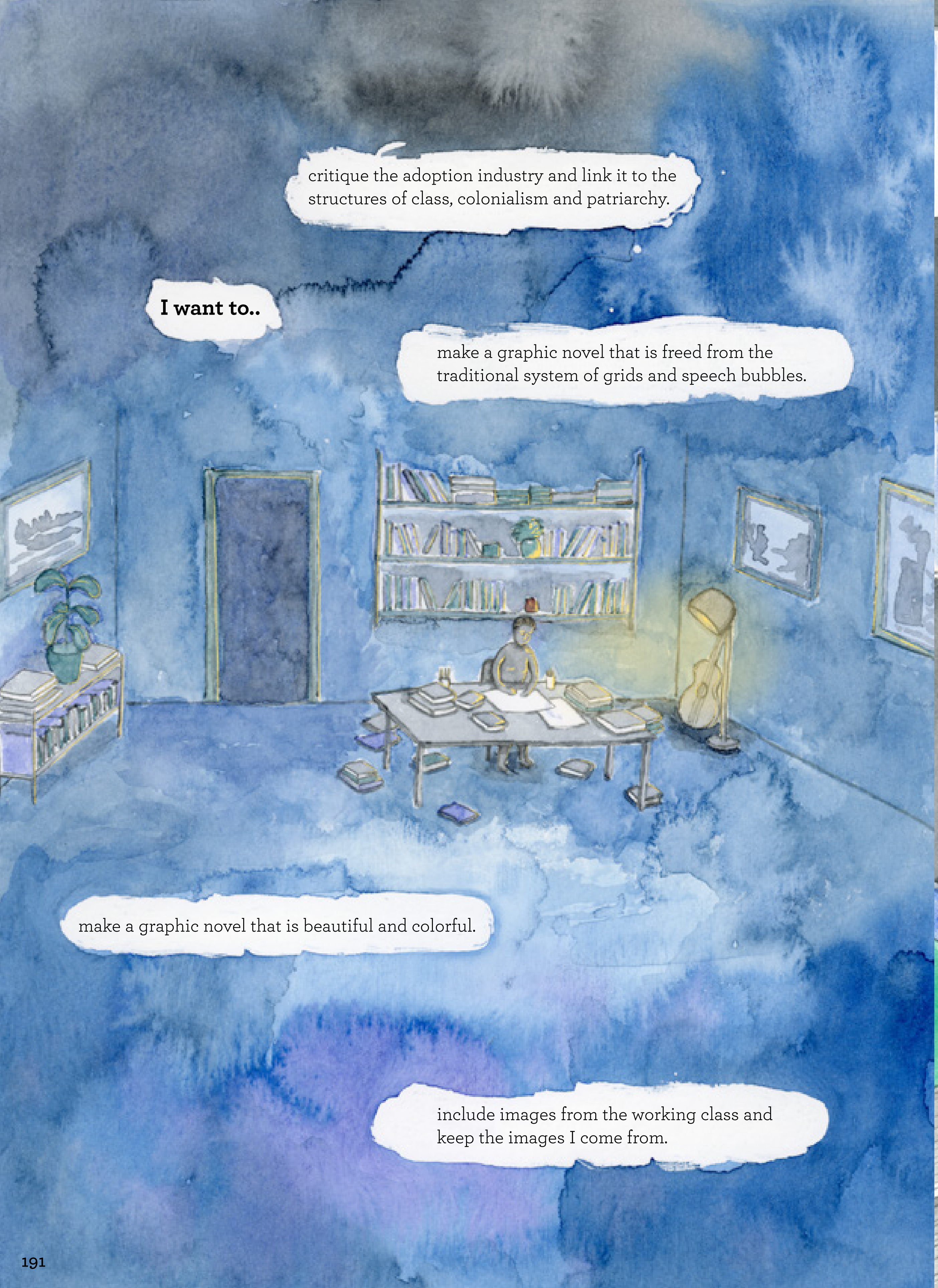
In November 2020, I started the program as the first PhD student in Sweden who got to do research with a focus on illustration through artistic practice.

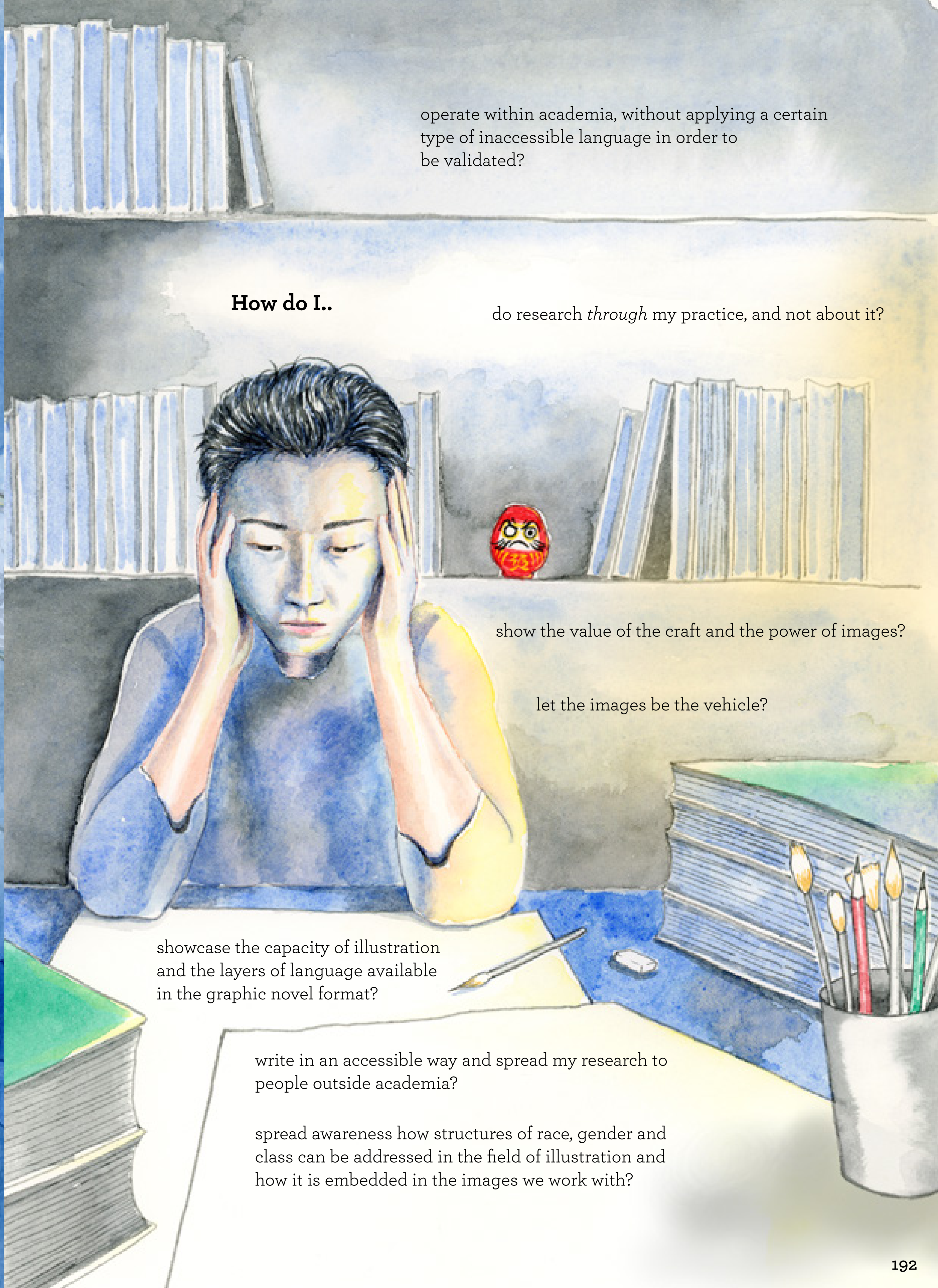
I am an adoptee but no longer just someone's child.
I'm an adult, I want to provide my own testimony.

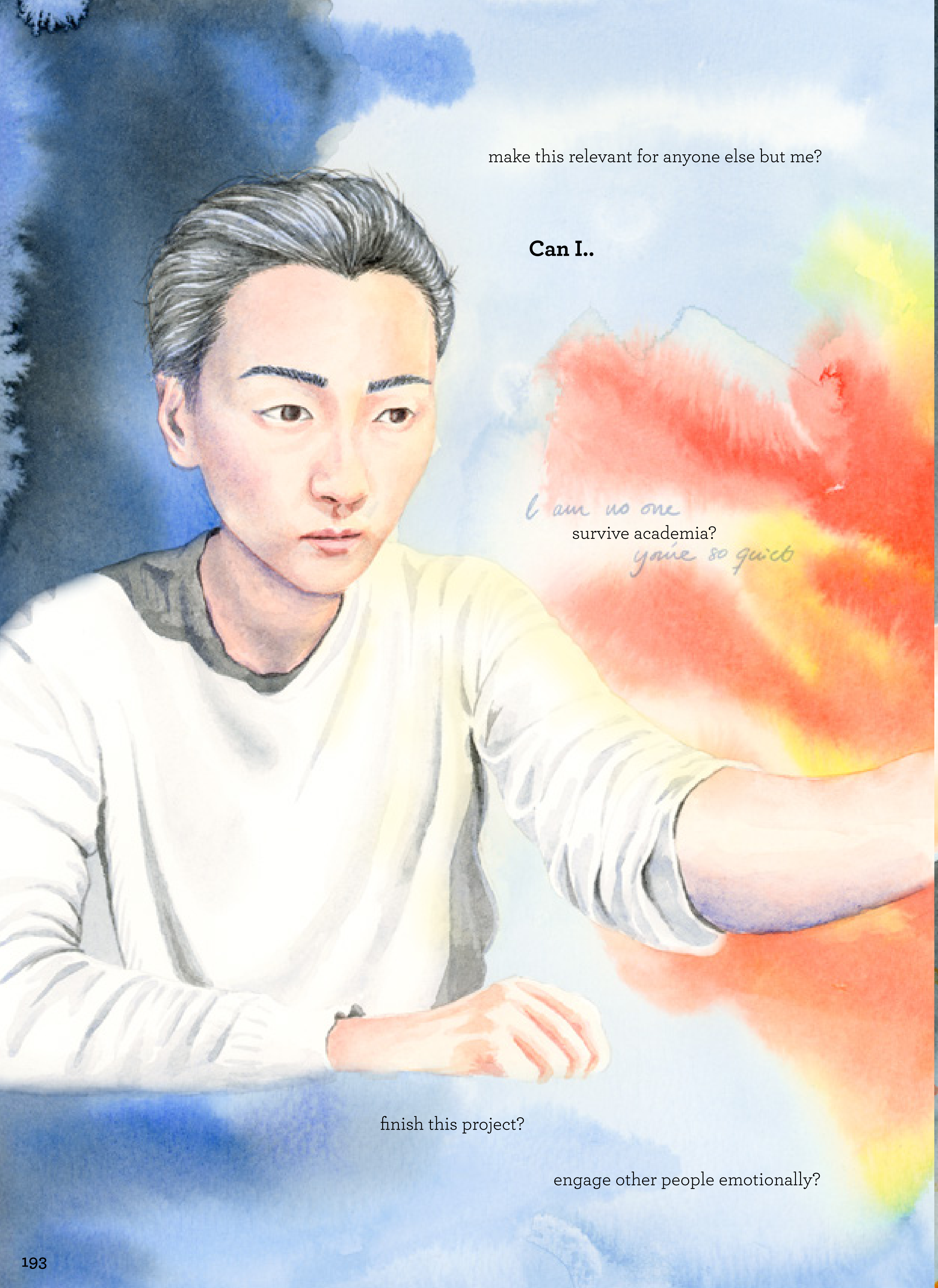
I want to remind you that behind 200,000 adoptees there are 200,000 separations. Not just between mother, father, child, but also between siblings.

We must broaden the narrative. We must ask ourselves if our positions in transracial adoption are equal. But above all, what is in the best interests of the child? Who are we to judge another parent worthy or unworthy?

The state still subsidizes the costs of expensive adoptions, but adoptees receive no financial support for return trips, family search or therapy, even if it's well known by now how adoptees are highly overrepresented in statistics regarding mental health issues and difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships.


critique the adoption industry and link it to the structures of class, colonialism and patriarchy.
I want to..
make a graphic novel that is freed from the traditional system of grids and speech bubbles.
make a graphic novel that is beautiful and colorful.
include images from the working class and keep the images I come from.


operate within academia, without applying a certain type of inaccessible language in order to be validated?
How do I..
do research *through* my practice, and not about it?
show the value of the craft and the power of images?
let the images be the vehicle?
showcase the capacity of illustration and the layers of language available in the graphic novel format?
write in an accessible way and spread my research to people outside academia?
spread awareness how structures of race, gender and class can be addressed in the field of illustration and how it is embedded in the images we work with?



make this relevant for anyone else but me?

Can I..

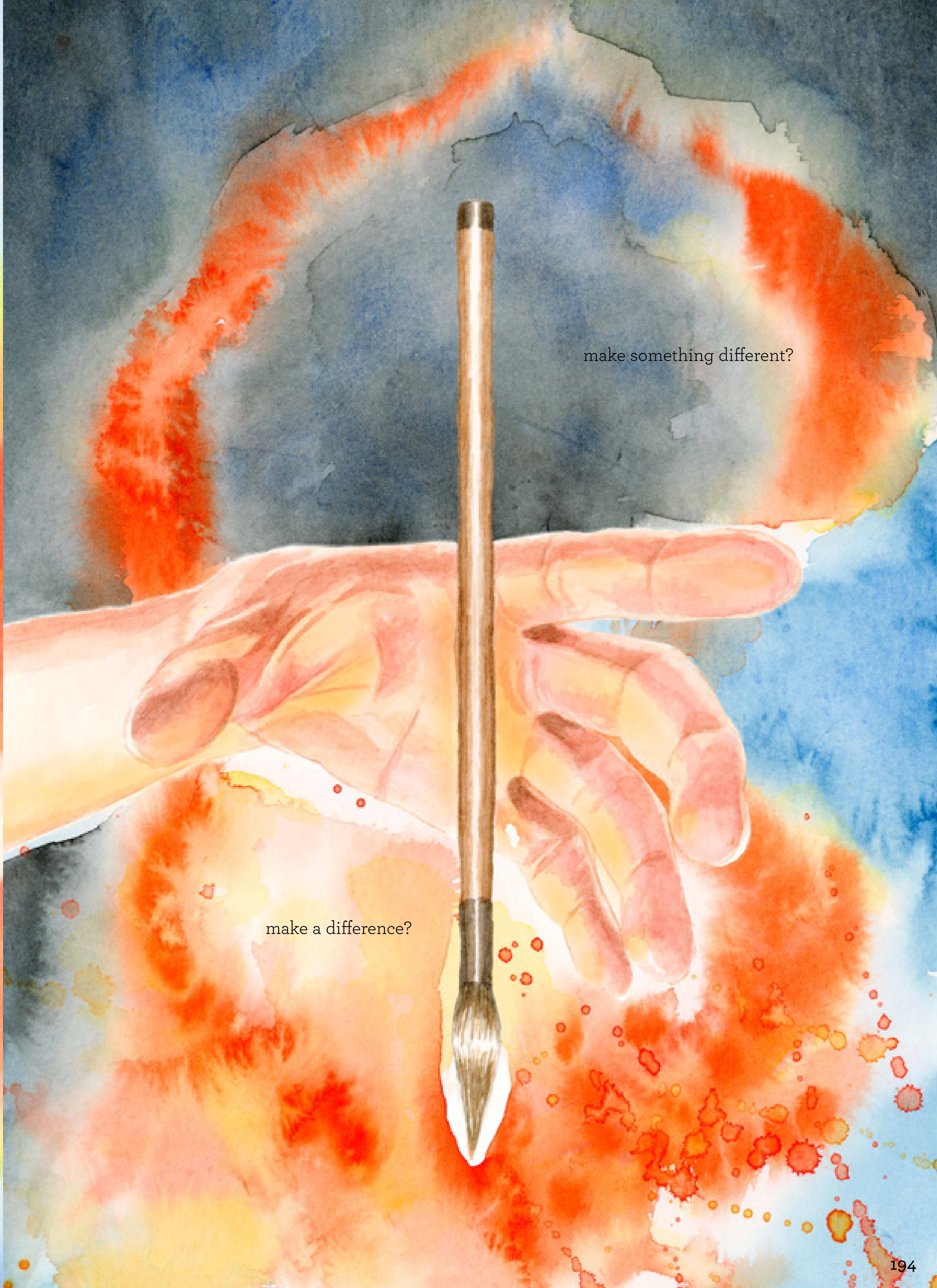
I am no one

survive academia?

you're so quick

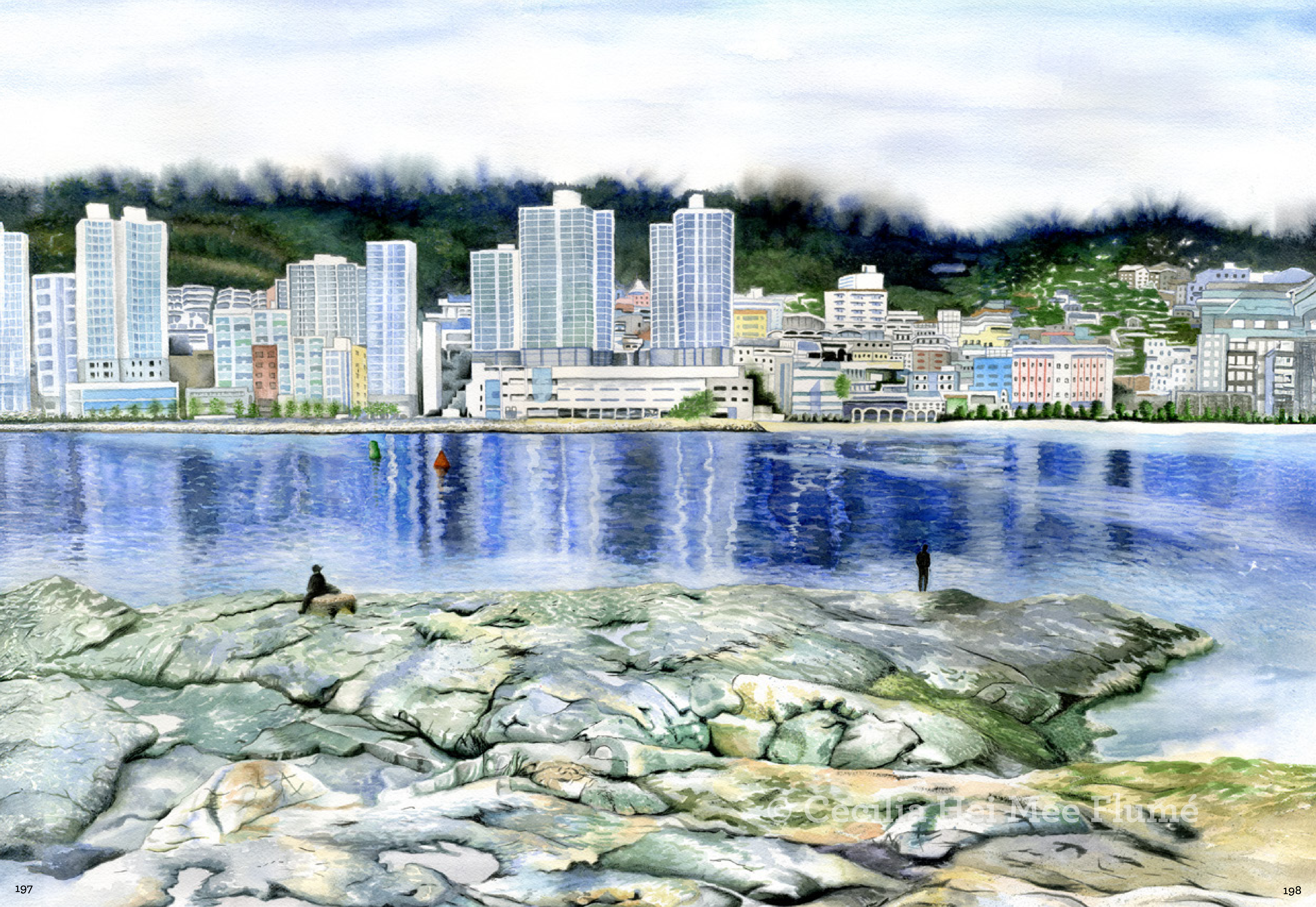
finish this project?

engage other people emotionally?



make something different?

make a difference?



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In 2021, Sweden initiated an investigation of international adoptions from the 1960's until today, with a focus on adoptions from Chile, South Korea and China. The intention was to investigate how much the Swedish government, authorities and agencies, municipalities and courts knew about suspicious and alarming activities.

By the summer of 2023, South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission announced that it would investigate 371 adoption cases suspected of involving falsified documents or illegal, corrupt practices.

This investigation was initiated at the demand of adoptees and came about largely due to pressure from the Danish adoptee activist group, the Danish Korean Rights Group (DKRG).

The commission will look at cases involving 11 nations where the adoptions took place between 1960 to 1990. My adoption file is one of the 21 cases submitted from Sweden.

I hope that this investigation can determine whether unethical adoptions were put into system and that the involved nations and agencies will be held responsible for their crimes, and the pain inflicted on separated families. I hope that it creates an urgency for other nations with international adoption history to examine any human rights violations within their programs. And that adoptees and our first families will be given truth and justice.

As I write this in the fall of 2024, we are finally witnessing significant shifts and major changes being implemented.

The Netherlands and Denmark have both halted all international adoptions, Norway has drastically reduced its adoption program, and China and Russia will cease sending babies for adoption overseas.

Soon, Sweden will also need to face a decision on whether to continue its adoption programs or bring them to an end.